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ABSTRACT

Containing the findings of a year-and-a-half investigation, this report outlines the present state of historical records in New York State, identifies problems in their treatment, and recommends corrective action. Assessed are the strengths and weaknesses of historical records programs in state and local government and nongovernment organizations, including libraries, historical societies, and other repositories. Findings include the following. Although the State Archives has made impressive progress since 1978 in developing policies and procedures for dealing with state records, it still lacks resources to fully implement all essential functions. Local government officials usually lack time, training, and resources to adequately manage their records. Programs for nongovernmental historical records are unsystematic and uncoordinated. Lack of public awareness partially accounts for the inadequate support of historical records programs. Greatly increasing the public's understanding of the importance of historical records and of issues in records management is a major underlying need. Also needed is better cooperation and communication among programs and an ongoing planning system. (RM)

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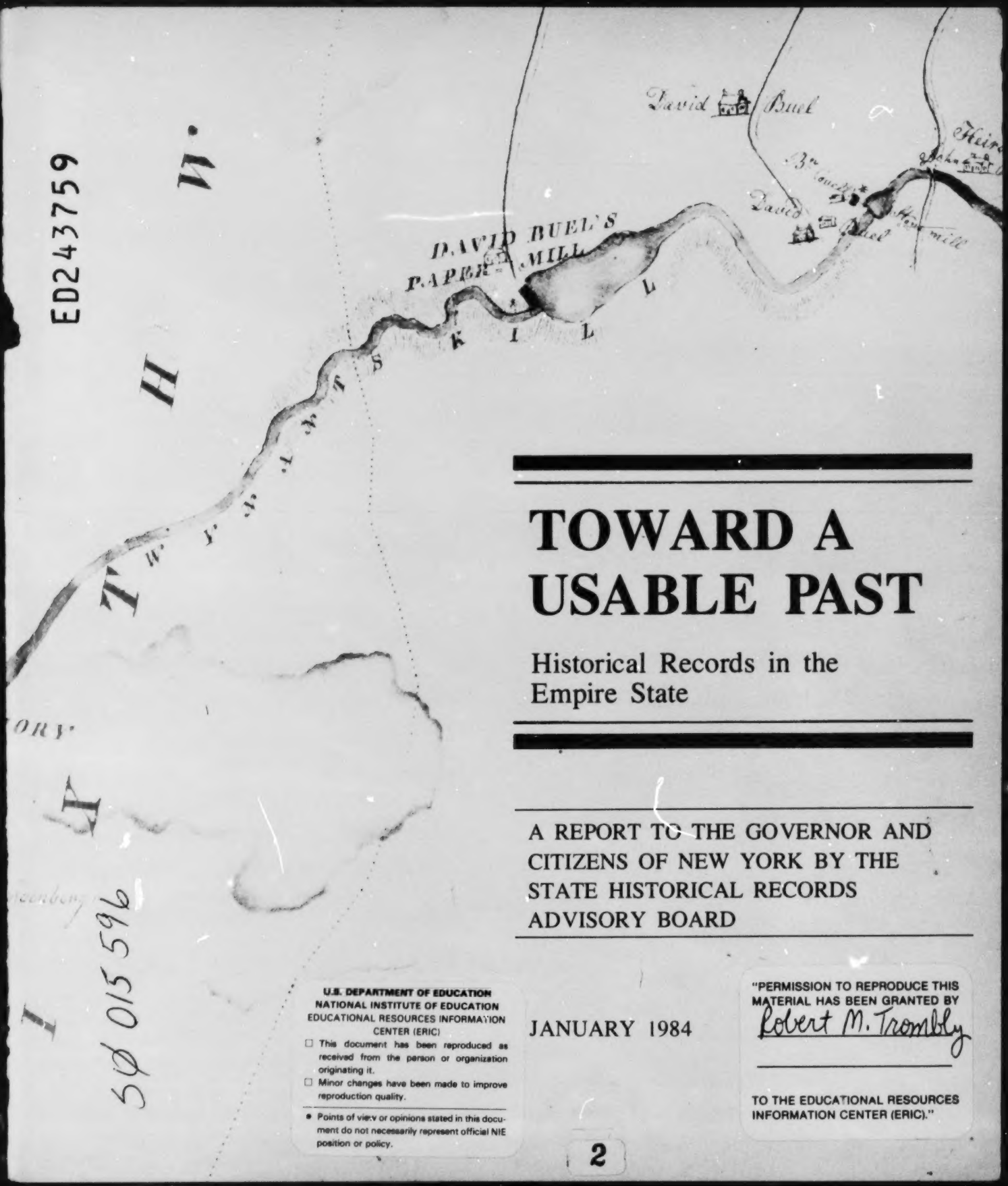

TOWARD A USABLE PAST

Historical Records in the Empire State

A REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR AND CITIZENS OF NEW YORK BY THE STATE HISTORICAL RECORDS ADVISORY BOARD

JANUARY 1984

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COVER:
Section of an 1817 map of Troy, New York, one of over 1500 maps in the State Archives from the records of the State Engineer and Surveyor, ca. 1744–1900. These maps document legal boundaries, land ownership, and the development of New York's communities. Many of the maps in this heavily used series have so deteriorated that they can no longer be used until they receive appropriate conservation treatment.

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JANUARY 1984

The historical records assessment project and publication of *Toward A Usable Past* were partially supported by a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

STATE OF NEW YORK
EXECUTIVE CHAMBER
ALBANY 12224

MARIO M. CUOMO
GOVERNOR

November 7, 1983

To the Citizens of New York:

I congratulate the members of the New York Historical Records Advisory Board on the completion of this first comprehensive assessment of the condition of New York's historical records. The Advisory Board has performed a great service to the Empire State. I am confident that the Board's report will stimlulate increased awareness of the importance of historical records and greater action to address the problems identified in Toward A Usable Past.

The Advisory Board's recommendations in several areas require serious consideration. These matters include the identification and preservation of the archival records of the Executive Chamber; the overall condition of records management in State government, especially in the Executive Branch; and the State Archives' programs for administering State archival records and for advising and assisting local governments and other historical records programs. My Administration looks forward to working with the State Archives and the State Historical Records Advisory Board to explore further their suggestions in these and other areas.

Greater leadership from State government must be matched by increased interest from other parts of the community. Private foundations and corporations, and the organizations that create records of long-range importance, should give particular attention to Toward A Usable Past; their increased financial support is essential to the archives, historical societies, libraries, museums, and other institutions that maintain and make available our historical records.

New York's history is a source of great pride to all of us. No other state has contributed so much to the economic, cultural, and political life of the nation and the world. No other state has such good reason to be conscious of its documentary heritage and to preserve and protect it. The Advisory Board's report offers us, for the first time, a sound basis for addressing this obligation.

Sincerely,

Mario M. Cuomo

NEW YORK STATE HISTORICAL RECORDS ADVISORY BOARD

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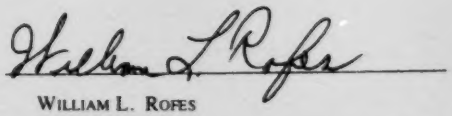

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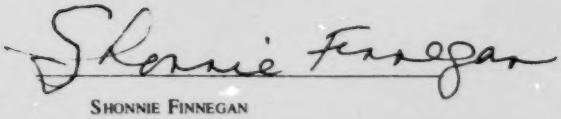

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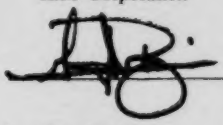

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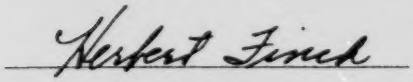

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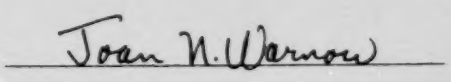

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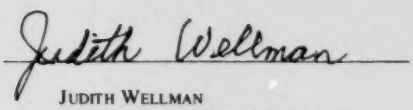

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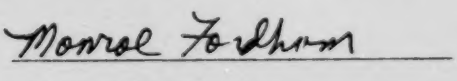

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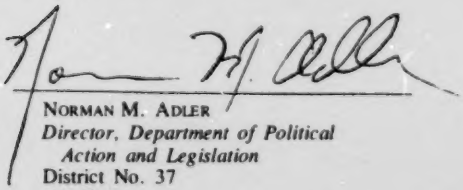

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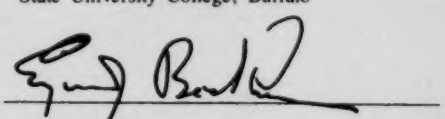

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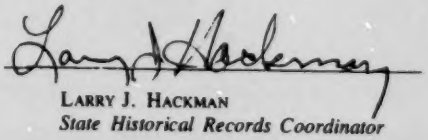

LARRY J. HACKMAN
State Historical Records Coordinator

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I
NEW YORK'S DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE: A SUMMARY OF "TOWARD A USABLE PAST"

Introduction

New York's documentary heritage is in danger! Records of enduring value to its citizens are incomplete and inaccessible. Programs to preserve and administer these records are haphazard and often do not meet minimal standards for their care.

The governments, organizations and citizens of New York are entitled to a usable past. In order to see their way through times of tumultuous change, citizens require more than ever an understanding of their history. Accurate documentation is essential to this understanding.

More energetic efforts must be made now to plan, coordinate, and promote programs for New York's historical records. Concerted action by this generation is essential to save this documentary heritage for our children and our children's children. Furthermore, without it, non-New Yorkers will be unable to understand the contributions of the Empire State to the nation and to the world. This report, *Toward a Usable Past*, outlines the present state of historical records in New York, identifies problems in their treatment, and recommends corrective action.

Background

Toward a Usable Past is a report to the Governor and the citizens of New York on the findings of a year-and-a-half investigation of historical records programs in the Empire State. It explains the cultural importance of historical records in transmitting our past to the future. It outlines the many very practical uses for such records in the day-to-day affairs of our State. The report assesses the strengths and weaknesses of historical records programs in State and local government, nongovernment organizations, and libraries, historical societies, and other repositories. Finally, the report considers problems that affect historical records throughout the State regardless of setting. For each aspect of the investigation, the report analyzes the factors underlying present deficiencies, and makes specific recommendations for dealing with them.

The report was prepared by the State Historical Records Advisory Board, a body of eleven New York citizens appointed by the Governor under Executive Order no. 38. This mandate charges the Board to provide planning and coordination for historical records in New York. Late in 1981 the Board, in cooperation with the State Archives, which serves as its secretariat, launched an intensive study of New York's historical records programs and needs. The study was assisted by a grant of $25,000 from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. In addition to using the considerable experience of its own members, the Board sent thousands of questionnaires to State and local government officials, historical records managers, and others interested in historical records. The Board arranged for studies by expert consultants. Its staff interviewed historical records administrators and their staffs. Discussions were held at public and professional meetings. Comments on the draft of this report were solicited from hundreds of leaders in State and local government and in the archival, historical, and library communities. The Advisory Board believes that such an extensive research and consultative effort provides a firm base for this first comprehensive statewide review of historical records programs, and for the Board's far-reaching recommendations for change.

Why Historical Records?

"Historical records" include all documents that contain important evidence of past events that have enduring value because they can help us intelligently deal with the present and prepare for the future. Historical records are a means by which our culture is passed from one generation to the next, and they are a font of information from which one generation can recover lessons that may have been ignored by its predecessors. Commentators on modern society have pointed out the increasing importance of maintaining connections with the lessons and values of the past in an era of tumultuous change in nearly every aspect of life. Historical records make these connections easier and more real. Indeed, the rapid increase of popular interest in family and community history is the obvious demonstration of our growing awareness of the need to find and understand our "roots." Historical records are indispensable sources, too, for the work of historians and other specialists who interpret the past for our present and future use.

Many historical records also have immediate, practical, everyday uses of considerable importance. They offer valuable information to government officials, public interest groups, and business people about past policies and decisions. They provide administrative continuity in times of crisis and rapid change of leadership and staff. They document the legal rights of citizens and their organizations, and the obligations of their state and local governments. They provide information essential for research into environmental, health, and welfare issues and crucial details for the repair or replacement of our buildings, bridges, streets, utilities, and other elements of our aging infrastructure. Historical records increasingly are used in New York's classrooms to help students experience a more direct understanding of their families, communities, and State. The study of actual records, rather than textbook discussions, of past events also aids the development of students' cognitive, analytical, and research abilities. The broad range of uses for New York's historical records indicates that their identification and sound administration are in the interest of all New Yorkers, present and future.

Records document the operation of our major social institutions, including some that most citizens seldom observe close up. The systematic selection and preservation of the archival records of such institutions increase their accountability to society.

FACTS RELATING TO FAMILY

FACTS RELATING TO INMATE

INSTITUTION RECORD

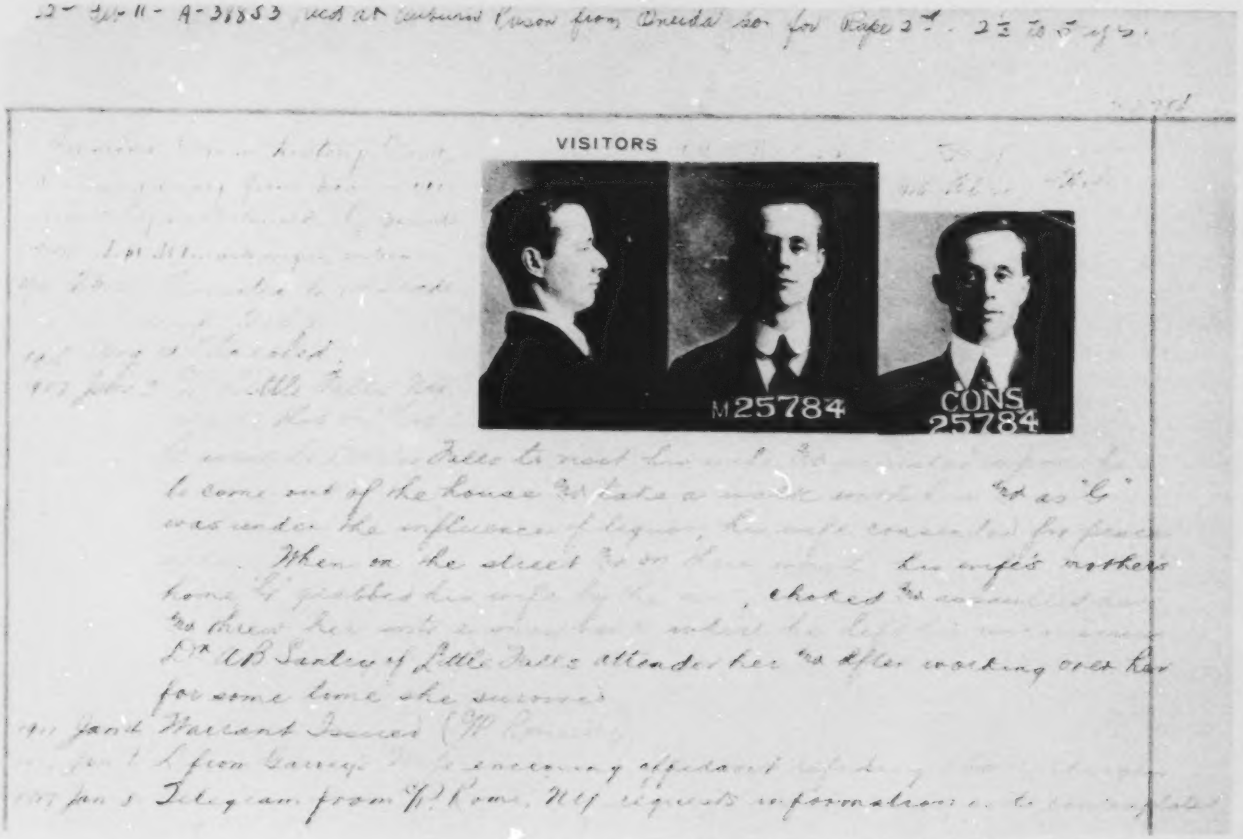
Page from inmate admission ledger, Western House of Refuge for Women, 1921.

Prisoner line up at Clinton (Dannemora) Prison, c. 1905.

Children in a mental asylum, c. 1900.

Class at Thomas Indian School, on the Cattaraugus Reservation, c. 1910.

Patients in a mental asylum, c. 1900.



Page from inmate biographical register, Elmira Reformatory, 1920.

New Yorkers and Historical Records: An Overview

New Yorkers have cared and do care about their history. In fact, New York has more historical records repositories than any other state. Some of these programs are among the outstanding in the nation, particularly in the importance of the records that they hold. The overall pattern, however, is a mixed one at best. Most historical records programs are underdeveloped, poorly supported, and unable to carry out essential archival tasks at even a minimal level. Moreover, lacking coordination and cooperation among programs, New York fails to take maximum advantage of the very modest resources that are presently available for historical records work.

This paradox, concern for history along with neglect of its records, is nowhere more apparent than in the development of the State's own archival program. Since the early Dutch period, the government and the public have been interested in the preservation of important government records. During the nineteenth century, the State government published many Colonial documents and authorized the State Library to maintain State government historical records. Not until the mid-twentieth century, however, did the Legislature pass a law to regulate the disposition of executive branch records; it was nearly three more decades before the State initiated a full-fledged archival program, the last state in the nation to do so. Now, after five years of operation, this new program still lacks the resources and the authority to meet the

archival needs even of its first client — the State government itself — to say nothing of nongovernment researchers. The State government's continuing failure to manage adequately its own records hampers effective, cost-efficient, and consistent government and severely handicaps efforts to retain its archives.

The State government's performance with regard to the records of local governments was, for a number of decades, substantially better than for its own records — and well ahead of local government records programs in many other states. Since 1911 New York has had a statute forbidding destruction of local government records without the approval of the Commissioner of Education. The State Education Department also has provided advisory services to local governments on the management of their records. The evidence indicates, however, that while many local governments have retained important records, few have developed effective programs to administer their archives and make them available. The State's records management advisory services have been insufficient to encourage sound practices in more than a handful of local governments. The assistance has been especially inadequate in micrographics, automated data processing, and other modern information technologies.

Historical societies, public, college, and university libraries, organizations' archives, and subject-oriented programs — more than two thousand institutions in all — collect and preserve nongovernment historical records in New York. The Board's survey indicates, however, that the vast majority of these programs are underdeveloped, underfunded, and understaffed. Most do not even have well-defined policies as to the records they seek and why they seek them. Although these programs are beset by many common problems, there has been little discussion of possible cooperative policies and programs to ensure the rational collection and efficient administration of historical records.

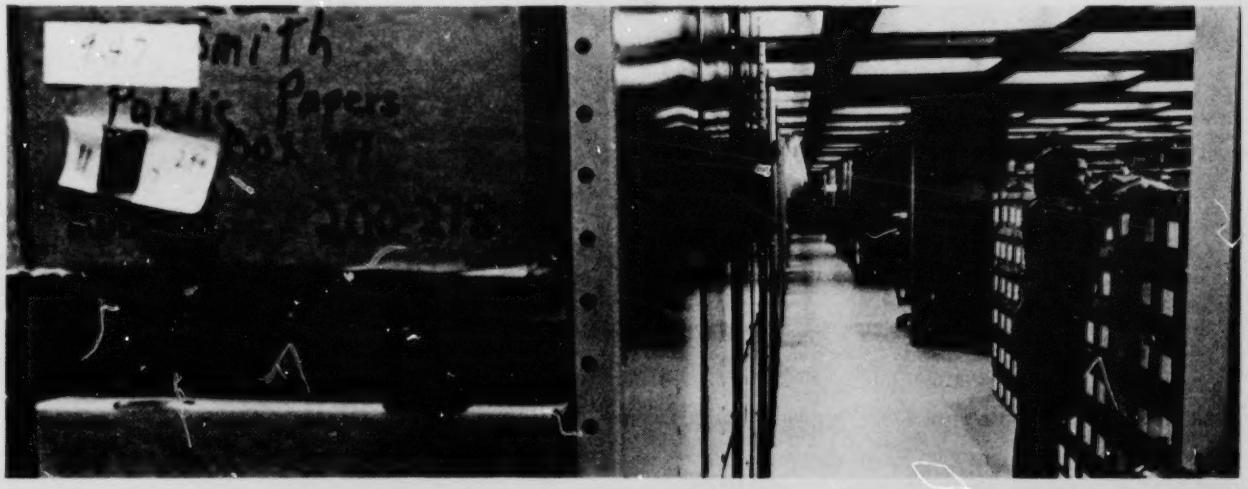
There are signs, however, that during the past decade a shift has begun from the narrow custodial outlook of the past toward a more cooperative and coordinated approach by repositories. For example, several archival associations have been created and they have begun to encourage dialogue within the repository community. A statewide survey of historical records has been completed in nearly forty upstate counties; this has facilitated research use of records and has raised awareness of program deficiencies. Introductory workshops in conservation and archival techniques have become more widely available. The State Archives and the State Historical Records Advisory Board have begun to provide statewide leadership and coordination of historical records problems. Each of these advances, however, also has revealed more clearly the seriousness and pervasiveness of historical records problems in New York, and the absence of more effective means to address them.

The following sections briefly summarize the Board's findings and recommendations in the four basic topics for analysis. Much more detailed discussion is contained in the full report.

State Government Records: Findings and Recommendations

Two overriding constraints limit the development of New York State's own archival program. First, none of the three branches of State government has developed an adequate program for the management of its records through their "life cycle" from creation to disposition. The State Office of General Services, which has statutory responsibility for encouraging sound records management practices and for overseeing records disposition in the Executive Branch, has not provided leadership or allocated resources sufficient to address problems presented by massive modern records systems. The absence of strong records management in the Executive Branch contributes to more costly and inefficient government, and severely cripples efforts to identify and retain those records that have long-term value for the government and its citizens.* This problem is becoming particularly serious with regard to information that is created or stored in automated data-processing and micrographics systems. The Legislature and the Unified Court System also lack thoughtful, well-developed programs for the management of their current records, especially for the identification and appropriate treatment of archival records. Only a handful of archival records from either branch has been transferred to the State Archives, which was created to serve all three branches.

Second, although the State Archives has made im-



A records storage area in the State Archives located in Albany. Most of the records in the State Archives are from major Executive Branch agencies such as the departments of State, Audit and Control, Education and Social Services. Archival records on the operation of the State Legislature and Judiciary are not being systematically identified and transferred to the State Archives. Ordinarily only about three percent of the records of State Government are judged to warrant archival status. The report recommends additional resources for the State Archives to take care of present holdings and future growth.

pressive progress since 1978 in developing policies and procedures for appraisal, arrangement, description, preservation, and reference programs for State records, it still lacks resources to fully implement all essential functions. It lacks both the staff and the authority to deal with the State's 350-year archival backlog and at the same time attend to recent archival records. Furthermore, the absence of effective records management programs throughout State government has the unfortunate consequence of diverting the Archives' scarce resources toward records management advisory services that are beyond its statutory responsibility and its present capacity.

To meet these deficiencies, the Board recommends dramatically upgraded records management in the State government, to encompass records in all three branches of State government. It should be geared closely to the Archives' appraisal efforts in identifying and preserving State archival records, and it should be coordinated by a State Records Management Council made up of representatives of all elements of the State government. The State Archives' legal authority over archival records also needs to be clarified and strengthened. The Archives should have a significantly increased budget to develop a program commensurate with New York's long-term archival needs.

Local Government Records: Findings and Recommendations

Local government officials, their associations, and the general public do not appreciate the importance of sound records management to efficient local government. Local government officials usually lack time, training, and resources to adequately manage their records and to identify and preserve those with continuing value; and citizens have not demanded adequate public records programs for their communities. State oversight, carried out since 1911 by a series of State Education Department offices including, since 1976, the State Archives, has had mixed results. Such supervision has prevented the wholesale destruc-

* At the time of this report, the Office of General Services had only one professional position dedicated to records management for the entire Executive Branch of government. By comparison, California had seven, Pennsylvania had eight, and Georgia had ten.

tion of local government records in many localities, and its publications and field staff presentations on filing, indexing, and fire protection have undoubtedly improved some records systems. However, the program has not kept pace with the times and it is not now meeting reasonable expectations for oversight and service for local government records. Most of the official "schedules" it issues for local records retention and disposition are badly outdated and difficult to use. It has not developed advisory services to encourage the comprehensive, long-term planning for records programs needed by local governments, particularly counties and cities. It has not effectively assisted local governments in adopting microfilming and automated data-processing, and in integrating them with other elements of records management. Perhaps most important, the State has not developed publications, field services, and other means of advising on the identification, care, and management of archival records. Partially as a consequence, these records have been neglected by local officials.

The Board's major recommendations for local government records fall into two categories. First, the general public must become better informed about the administration of the records of its local governments and start demanding improvement. This is a key to greater responsibility and better performance by local officials. Second, State services must become more active in promoting sound records management and archival programs. As with State records, effective local records management is essential for maintaining adequate local government archives.

Therefore, the State Archives' approach to its local records responsibilities needs significant redirection. Schedules for the disposition of records must become more flexible and easier to follow, and they should be developed in closer cooperation with local officials. State oversight for local records should focus on the identification and preservation of records of archival value. State Archives' publications, workshops, and advisory services should emphasize overall program planning and development, the establishment of model programs, the adoption and use of new information technology, and, of paramount importance, the systematic care and management of archival records. Local governments should be encouraged to rely more heavily on microfilm to preserve and disseminate information in their archival records. State Archives' advisory services should be delivered primarily on a regional basis, preferably in cooperation with existing regional service systems.

Nongovernment Historical Records: Findings and Recommendations

This part of the report should be read in conjunction with the following section, "Common Problems/Coordinated Solutions," because many of the issues are closely related. The Board's study found that programs for nongovernmental historical records are unsystematic and uncoordinated. There is no regular forum for developing methodical documentation of key topical areas or geographic regions, or for promoting cooperative administration of the records collected. Another widespread problem is that most of New York's religious, business, labor, cultural, educational, and other organizations — even the largest and most prominent — do not accept responsibility for supporting the care of their own historical records, either in-house or in an appropriate repository.

Nearly all repository programs in New York State are underdeveloped. They have insufficent staff, operating budgets, and other resources. These programs usually do not rank high in the priorities of their institutions. Their budgets are small and have not kept pace with inflation, new accessions, and the volume of research. In most programs, the staff is too small, and lacks training and proficiency, to carry out essential archival functions. Records are often poorly arranged and described — if at all. Poor environments (inadequate storage containers, uncontrolled temperature and humidity) accelerate the physical breakdown of the records. Largely due to the lack of good arrangement and description, records are underutilized by researchers.

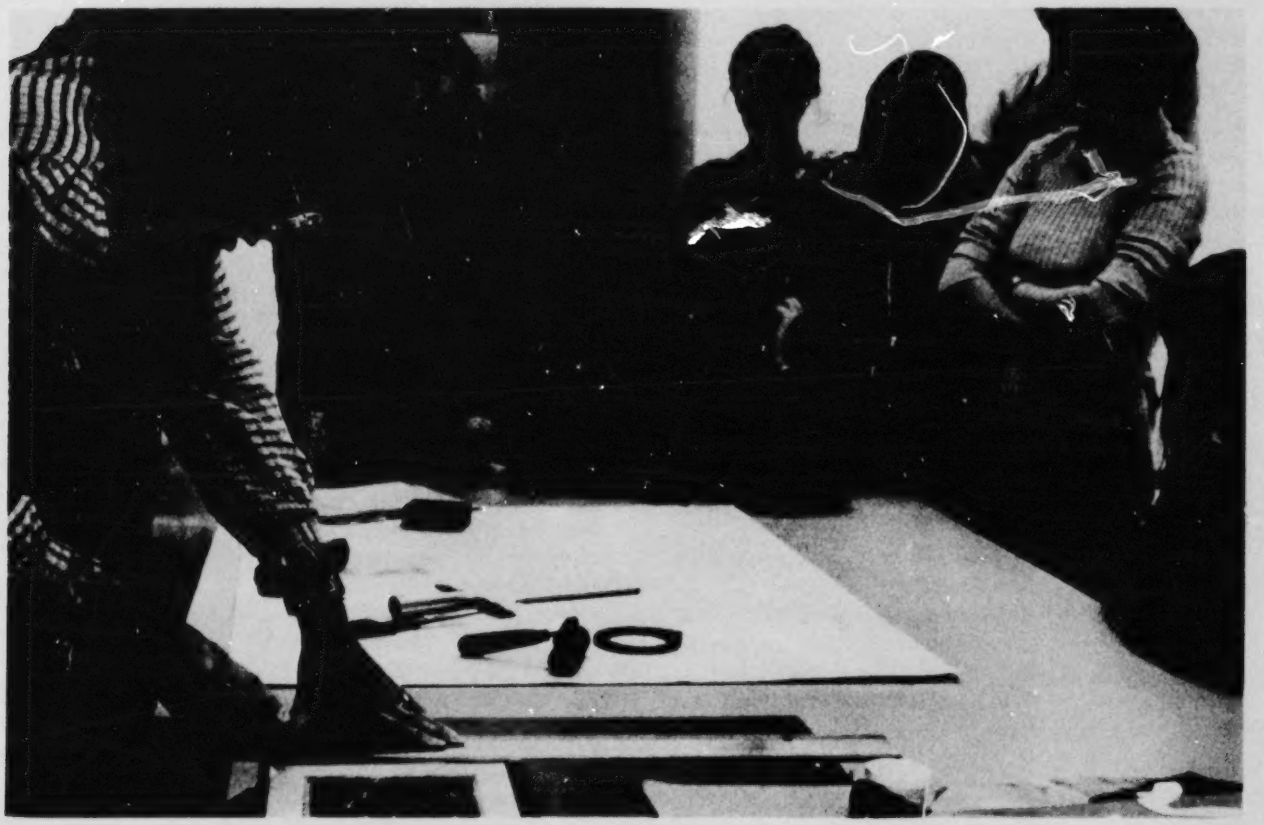
The Board recommends two major initiatives to address this pattern of deficiency and need. First, the repository community should develop coordinated documentation strategies and cooperative programming to achieve more rational and cost-efficient collection and care of historical records. Second, new field-based State advisory services should be developed by the State and integrated with similar services recommended for local governments. These advisory services should encourage development of coordi-

nated documentation strategies and cooperative programming, provide advice on program planning and evaluation, and furnish training and consultation in conservation, microfilming, automation, and other technical areas. Other State activities, such as the Regents' chartering of historical agencies and libraries, and grants under the grant-in-aid program recommended in the next section, should be geared to furthering these objectives. A period of experimentation and refinement will be required to determine the most effective way to achieve the planning, coordination, cooperation, and program quality needed by New York repositories.

Common Problems/Coordinated Solutions

The Board's conclusions in this section have implications for all other areas already discussed. The problems identified are interrelated and reinforce each other. Integrated solutions are essential to address these problems.

Greatly increasing the public's understanding of the importance of historical records and of issues in records management is a major underlying need. Lack of public awareness partially accounts for the inadequate support of historical records programs, which contributes substantially to their underdevelop-



A conservation seminar illustrating mylar encapsulation of a fragile document so that it can continue to be made available for research use. Developing informed and cost-efficient preservation programs, and the resources to carry them out, is a problem for all New York historical records repositories. The Advisory Board's survey indicated that less than five percent of repositories carry out in-house conservation laboratory work, and less than twenty percent send selected records for treatment by a professional conservator. Of greater immediate concern, only about a quarter of New York repositories have temperature and humidity controls for the environment in which they store their historical records. Much of New York's documentary heritage is in danger of self-destructing before it can receive conservation treatment or be duplicated through microfilming or other means.

ment and underutilization. Over a long period, the historical records community has lacked leadership and coordination, particularly from State government. It also has not had agreed-upon mechanisms for planning, coordination, or program development beyond each separate repository. Already inclined toward a conservative custodial approach to their unique holdings, repositories have generally operated in isolation from each other with little attention to the identification of shared problems or to the development of cooperative solutions. Operating on their own, few repositories have, for example, successfully faced the overwhelming challenge of records preservation or been able to seize the opportunities offered by such technical advances as automation.

The long absence of a statewide survey of historical records and of the repositories which hold them has compounded the sense of isolation and has greatly limited the ease of public access to New York's documentary heritage. Although Federal funds provided support for such a survey in nearly forty upstate counties in the late 1970's and early 1980's, the State government has been unwilling to provide even a share of support for this basic planning and public service effort.

Where substantial progress has been made in recent years, it has often been due to the modest Federal funds available from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission and the National Endowment for the Humanities. These very limited matching grants have provided the impetus for greater financial support from certain New York local governments, repositories, and organizational archives. Despite its major State funding for the arts and for historic preservation, however, New York has no grant-in-aid program to assist with basic historical records work.

To address these common problems, the Board believes that a number of coordinated initiatives are necessary. Of prime importance is building on this first statewide assessment of historical records programs to develop an ongoing planning system to evaluate conditions, establish priorities, recommend action, and monitor progress in this crucial effort in New York. It is also essential to draw the historical records community more closely together to improve both its internal communication and its public information and education programs. In order to benefit from and lend support to historical records programs, the public needs to hear more about them. To better serve this public, develop rational documentation strategies, and promote cooperation among programs, completion of the statewide survey of repositories and their holdings is a clear and urgent priority. The value of the work completed upstate over the past several years must not be diluted because of the lack of data for Long Island, New York City, and the lower Hudson Valley.

The improved communication and planning mechanisms, suggested above, should be drawn upon to develop statewide strategies for historical records preservation and for the training of those who have custody and responsibility for historical records. Finally, additional financial support is required for historical records. This should come not only from the institutions which maintain historical records but also from a State grant-in-aid program directed at historical records work, from an expanded records grant program at the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, and from a vigorous effort to encourage private-sector funding for historical records projects.

The Board itself, working through the State Archives and in close cooperation with the entire historical records community in New York, expects to take the lead in encouraging these coordinated solutions to the problems outlined above. Progress, however, will require the interest and strong support of the government and citizens of New York State.

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II
LIST OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Findings and Recommendations of the New York State Historical Records Advisory Board cover the four topics of its Assessment and Reporting Project: State Government Records, Local Government Records, Nongovernment Historical Records, and Common Problems/Coordinated Solutions. The Findings and Recommendations summarized here are explained in full in Section VI of the report, pp. 33–70.

PROCLAMATION

State of New York

Executive Chamber

The historical records of our society constitute an invaluable cultural resource. They are an irreplaceable storehouse of important information about our people, their lives and inspirations, their work and institutions.

Only by preserving records can we review with satisfaction and pride the achievements of the past, while using the knowledge we gain to deal with the problems of the present.

Dedicated archivists, the keepers of these records, perform a vital role not only in preserving this unique material but also in making it available for research by historians and the citizenry of the State, the Nation and the World.

A. State Government Records

Findings

1. Records management in New York State government is weak or nonexistent; without sound records management programs, an adequate archival program is impossible. (p.34)
2. The State Archives program is administered along sound lines but is underdeveloped. (p.36)

Recommendations

1. A comprehensive records management program should be developed for State government records. (p.38)
2. A State Records Management Council, similar to those in several other states, should be established by statute to oversee and provide direction for all aspects of the State's records management program. (p.39)
3. The legal authority of the State Archives should be clarified and strengthened in several critical areas. (p.40)
4. The State Archives should be given additional resources in order to address urgent priorities and develop several critical program functions. (p.41)
5. The State Archives' facilities should be improved and expanded. (p.42)

B. Local Government Records

Findings

1. Most local government officials do not recognize the potential importance of their records as informational and cultural resources and have not developed programs for their sound management. (p.43)
2. There is insufficient public interest in and understanding of local government records issues. (p.44)
3. State court records in local government custody are a pressing problem in need of immediate attention. (p.44)
4. The State Archives lacks sufficient staff and other resources to carry out its local government records responsibilities. (p.44)
5. The State Archives' records retention and disposition procedures are inadequate. (p.45)
6. The State Archives' records management advisory services are not meeting the records management needs of New York's local governments. (p.45)
7. Insufficient attention is being given to archival records by both local governments and by the State Archives. (p.45)
8. Statutes governing access to sensitive local government records are inconsistent. (p.46)

Recommendations

1. Responsibility for sound management of local government records should be clearly defined. (p.47)
2. The State Archives should be given additional resources in order to develop a regional technical assistance system and to improve overall advisory services to local governments. (p.47)
3. State records advisory services should emphasize archival records. (p.48)
4. State records management advice should focus on program planning and management rather than on individual records problems. (p.49)
5. State oversight of records retention and disposition should be changed to give more authority and responsibility to local officials and to simplify disposition procedures. (p.50)
6. Programs should be developed to promote the microfilming of local government archival records. (p.50)
7. Special, immediate attention should be given to developing management and archival programs for court records. (p.51)
8. The Commissioner of Education should create an ongoing advisory committee to counsel the Department and the State Archives on their local records services. (p.51)

9. Researchers' right of access to sensitive local government records should be clarified. (p.51)

One of the large number of New York repositories collecting nongovernment historical records from the local area.

C. Nongovernment Historical Records

Findings

1. The collection of historical records in New York is unsystematic, uncoordinated, and incomplete. (p.52)
2. Most historical records programs are underdeveloped and need to be strengthened to carry out essential archival functions. (p.53)

Recommendations

1. Coordinated documentation strategies should be developed to ensure that adequate records are preserved and soundly administered in all important subjects and all geographical regions. (p. 55)
2. Advisory services should be provided to historical records programs on a regional basis. (p.57)

D. Common Problems/Coordinated Solutions

Findings

1. Public interest in historical records is increasing but the public does not yet have sufficient appreciation of the importance of historical records programs. (p.58)
2. There is no established and accepted archival leadership in New York State. (p.58)
3. Despite notable exceptions, historical records programs overall in New York operate independently and in isolation from each other. (p.58)
4. There are few systematic, accessible programs for training to meet historical records program needs. (p.59)
5. Few historical records programs have developed sound approaches to the problem of preservation of their records. (p.59)
6. Developments in information technology pose unprecedented opportunities and challenges to historical records programs. (p.60)
7. Compilation of a statewide listing of historical records is assisting the management of historical records and stimulating wider research in the records; its continuation is crucial to improved access and program development. (p.61)
8. Historical records are underutilized, to the detriment of society, present and future. (p.61)
9. The National Historical Publications and Records Commission's records grant program has strengthened many historical records programs in New York and its effectiveness has helped to demonstrate the need for a State-based grant-in-aid program. (p.61)

Recommendations

1. Long-term goals and priorities should be established for meeting historical records needs

throughout the State. (p.63)

2. More cooperation and communication must be developed among historical records programs. (p.63)
3. Organizations and associations concerned with historical records should act in concert to promote historical records programs. (p.63)
4. Public information and educational programs should be developed by historical records programs throughout the State. (p.64)
5. More varied and significant use of historical records should be encouraged. (p.64)
6. The statewide survey of historical records now in progress must be completed for the rest of the State. (p.64)
7. A statewide strategy should be initiated to provide professional development opportunities for personnel who have charge of historical records. (p.65)
8. A statewide strategy should be developed to deal with historical records preservation. (p.66)
9. The National Historical Publications and Records Commission's records grant program should be continued and expanded. (p.67)
10. State grant funds should be allocated to support special historical records projects. (p.67)
11. A separate effort should be made to identify and encourage private-sector funding for historical records projects. (p.69)
12. The State Historical Records Advisory Board must exercise strong statewide leadership for the improvement of historical records programs in New York State. (p.69)

III

STATE COORDINATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Toward A Usable Past is the report of the Historical Records Assessment and Reporting Project of the New York State Historical Records Advisory Board. This project was undertaken to assess management of historical records in New York and to focus public attention on issues and problems in the preservation and use of this documentary heritage. The report provides a basis for setting priorities, allocating scarce resources, and planning concerted action to strengthen historical records programming. The study was partially underwritten by a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, a Federal agency that supports historical records projects. These grant funds served as a catalyst for the project, but responsibility for initiating and conducting the project — and for carrying out its recommendtions — rests with New Yorkers.

The project was ambitious in intent and in scope. The study was carried out during a period of eighteen months in four activity areas: State government records, local government records, nongovernment historical records, and statewide functions and services. Information was gathered about each of these four aspects of historical records management in New York State.

A. State government records. The Board examined materials furnished by the State Archives on State archival and records management programs, and drew on the report of a consultant, F. Gerald Ham, the Wisconsin State Archivist, who visited Albany to analyze New York State government programs. The Board also examined the results of questionnaires submitted to State agency records officers and State Assembly committees, and studied comments from the State Senate and the Office of Court Administration. The Board also took into account the experience and views of State Archives staff.

B. Local government records. In this area, the Board drew on its own findings in the Local Government Archives Project (1979-1983), administered in conjunction with the State Archives, and on materials furnished by the Archives about its services to local governments. The Board also relied on a consultant, R. Nicholas Olsberg, former State Archivist of Massachusetts and now an independent archival consultant, who visited Albany and several local governments to gauge the management of local government archival records. On behalf of the Board, the State Archives circulated approximately 5,500 questionnaires to local government officials on records management and archival questions, approximately 1,700 of which were returned. The results were tabulated by computer and made available to the Board. Associations of local government officials also were asked their views on local records programs and needs, and on State services.

C. Nongovernment historical records. Here, the Board drew on a statistical analysis of 520 questionnaires from over 2,200 sent to libraries, historical societies, and other programs for nongovernmental historical records. The Board also considered a report prepared by State Archives staff on telephone interviews with approximately two dozen historical records program administrators, reviewed comments in the questionnaires returned by many repositories, and also reviewed publications about New York repositories. The New York Historical Resources Center at Cornell University provided data on conservation needs and on local government records in private repositories. Information gathered on common problems and coordinated solutions (below) also was useful in the analysis of historical records repositories; indeed findings and recommendations on this and the following topic are very closely related.

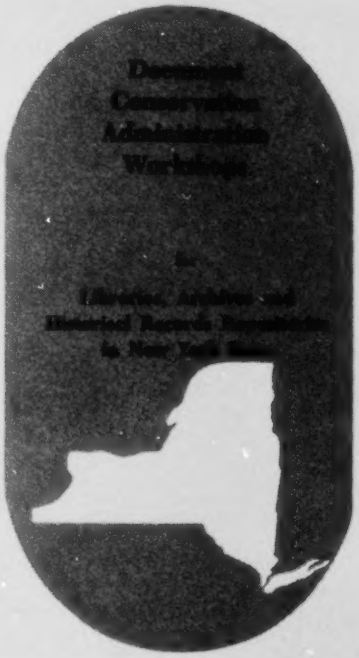
D. Common problems/coordinated solutions. Here, the Board significantly relied on the approximately three dozen responses to an open-ended questionnaire distributed to over 250 leaders in the archival, library, and historical communities. In this area, more than in the other three areas, the Board also drew heavily on its own individual and collective experiences.

The overall project was also discussed at professional meetings and conferences. After the report was prepared in draft form, it was circulated for review and comment to over 300 organizations and leaders in the historical, library, and archival communities.

The information gathered revealed that New Yorkers have long been actively concerned about State and local government records as well as records created by private individuals and organizations. The project confirmed that New York has some very strong individual historical records repositories, and is providing national leadership in several historical records management activities. However, the project also disclosed very uneven performance overall, with major deficiencies in every area and severe lack of coordination among programs.

The findings and the recommendations indicate that there is much work to be done. The Advisory Board, in line with New York's best traditions of taking the long view while aggressively tackling immediate problems, has laid out ambitious recommendations for all of us to address together. The Board makes these recommendations in the firm belief that, even in difficult times, we can find adequate resources, allocate them wisely, and move ahead with the important work of preserving our documentary heritage. The steady cooperation of the many individuals, programs, and associations already involved with historical records will be required to achieve these goals, as will increased involvement of the user community. Perhaps most important is increased un-

THE NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES
AND
THE NEW YORK STATE LIBRARY
ANNOUNCE
A SERIES OF



Funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities

Several important initiatives began while the Advisory Board's Assessment Project was still under way. One of these is a three-year Document Conservation Adminstration Training and Planning Project to provide training for program administrators and to develop strategies and long-range plans for document conservation in New York.

derstanding and support from a concerned public. In a very real sense, those of us who have custody of historical records are acting for all New Yorkers in preserving the documentary heritage that belongs to us all. We need to make clear, however, why all New Yorkers share the responsibility to support the preservation and management of our historical records, and we must show how they can meet that responsibility.

Many individuals and organizations have contributed to the Statewide Assessment Project and to this report. The Historical Records Advisory Board supervised the entire Assessment and Reporting Project and directed production of the report through four committees, one for each of the four areas of the report. The chairpersons of the committees served as the steering committee for the project.

Committees

State Government Records	Eugene J. Bockman, Chair Norman M. Adler William L. Rofes
Local Government Records	Patricia B. Adduci, Chair Guy Paquin
Nongovernment Historical Records	Herbert Finch, Chair Monroe Fordham Harold C. Syrett
Common Problems, Coordinated Solutions	Shonnie Finnegan, Chair Joan N. Warnow Judith Wellman

The Board's two consultants, F. Gerald Ham and R. Nicholas Olsberg, submitted reports that contributed immeasurably to the project. Mr. David Bearman of the Smithsonian Institution read the draft report and made many suggestions for its improvement. Mr. Malcolm Willison copy edited the entire report.

Many organizations and individuals throughout

the Empire State answered questionnaires and provided their views in other ways. Special thanks are extended to:

The New York State Assembly Program and Committee Staff Office
The New York State Council on the Arts
The New York Historical Resources Center, Cornell University
The New York Public Library
The Association of Towns of the State of New York
The New York State Association of Counties
The New York State Conference of Mayors and Other Municipal Officials
The New York State School Boards Association.

Within the State Education Department, the Information Center on Education and the Bureau of Statistical Services provided invaluable assistance in design and distribution of the project questionnaires and in furnishing electronic data processing services for the returned questionnaires. Staff of the New York State Library and The Division of Historical and Anthropological Services of the New York State Museum also provided helpful counsel.

Several State Archives staff members contributed heavily to the assessment project. Bruce Dearstyne deserves special credit; he was responsible for the day-to-day management of the entire project and did most of the initial drafting of the report. Thomas E. Mills assembled a great deal of information needed for analysis of State records programs, and Mark Jones and John A. Leith did the same for local records. James D. Folts gathered and analyzed much of the information on nongovernmental records. Richard Andress coordinated mailing of the questionnaires and worked closely with Education Department EDP personnel in processing the returns. Terri Sewell, JoAnne Burnside, Bernie Waldman, Justine Bouchey, and Tammi Jackson assisted with mailings, arrangements for meetings, and the typing of the multitude of memos, questionnaires, drafts, and the final report. Finally, Carole Huxley, the Deputy Commissioner for Cultural Education, provided support throughout the project, sharing our enthusiasm for a far-ranging review of the present state of affairs and a positive view of the future.

The citizens of New York as well as the New York State Historical Records Advisory Board are indebted to all these people for their assistance.

LARRY J. HACKMAN
State Historical Records Coordinator
September 1983

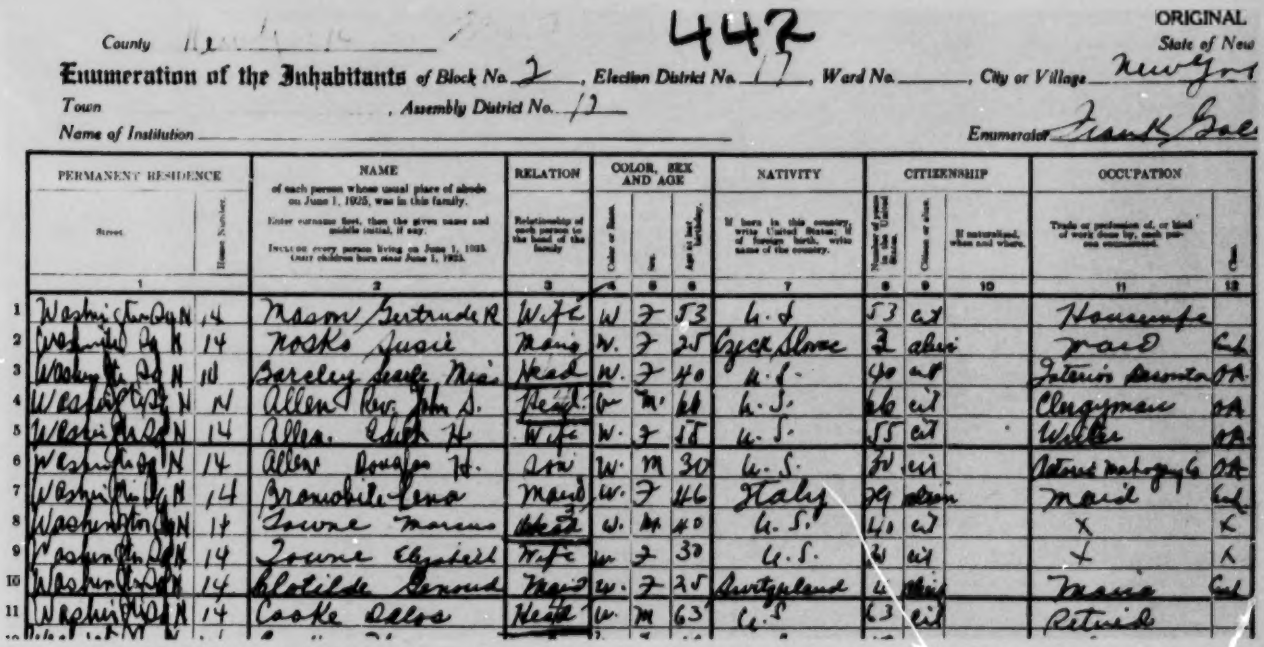
IV

HISTORICAL RECORDS AND SOCIAL NEEDS

Why should the citizens of New York be concerned over historical records and the findings and recommendations of this report? The answer is simple: historical records are important to the well-being of New York and to the welfare of its citizens. Recognition of this fact leads to a deeper appreciation of the significance of historical records issues.

Historical records: the essence of society's experience. The term "records" is sometimes misunderstood. It refers to any type of recorded information, regardless of its physical characteristic. Records include diaries, journals, ledgers, minutes, reports, photographs, maps, drawings, blueprints, agreements, memoranda, deeds, case files, and other material. They may take many physical forms — parchment, paper, microfilm, cassette tape, film, videotape, and, with the advent of the latest information-processing technology, computer tapes, discs, and other "machine-readable" formats.

Records are extensions of the human memory, deliberately created to record information, to document transactions, to communicate thought, and to provide lasting evidence of important events and developments. Their creation and maintenance spring from a fundamental human need to record and keep track of information, to store it and be able to retrieve it as needed. Records thus are essential connections with the past. They provide the basis for understanding where we have been, they orient us to our present, and they provide guidance for our progress into the future.



County [illegible] 447 ORIGINAL

Enumeration of the Inhabitants of Block No. 2, Election District No. 17, Ward No. _____, City or Village New York

Town _____, Assembly District No. 12

Name of Institution _____ Enumerator Frank Gale

	PERMANENT RESIDENCE: Street	House Number	NAME of each person whose usual place of abode on June 1, 1925, was in this family. Enter surname first, then the given name and middle initial, if any. Include every person living on June 1, 1925. Omit children born since June 1, 1925.	RELATION: Relationship of each person to the head of the family	COLOR, SEX AND AGE: Color	Sex	Age last birthday	NATIVITY: If born in this country, write United States; if of foreign birth, write name of the country.	CITIZENSHIP: Number of years in the United States	Citizen or Alien	If naturalized, when and where.	OCCUPATION: Trade or profession of, or kind of work done by, each person enumerated.	Idle
	1		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	Washington Pl	N 14	Mason Gertrude R	Wife	W	F	53	U.S.	53	cit		Housewife	
2	Washington Pl	N 14	Nosko Susie	Maid	W	F	25	Czech Slovac	3	alien		Maid	Cd
3	Washington Pl	N 10	Barclay George Mrs	Head	W	F	40	U.S.	40	cit		Interior Decorator	OA
4	Washington Pl	N 11	Allen Rev. John S.	Head	W	M	66	U.S.	66	cit		Clergyman	OA
5	Washington Pl	N 14	Allen Edith H	Wife	W	F	55	U.S.	55	cit		Writer	OA
6	Washington Pl	N 14	Allen Douglas H.	Son	W	M	30	U.S.	30	cit		Interior Mahogany Co	OA
7	Washington Pl	N 14	Bronobile Lena	Maid	W	F	46	Italy	29	alien		Maid	Cd
8	Washington Pl	N 14	Towne Marion	Head	W	M	40	U.S.	40	cit		X	X
9	Washington Pl	N 14	Towne Elizabeth	Wife	W	F	30	U.S.	30	cit		X	X
10	Washington Pl	N 14	Clotilde Gerard	Maid	W	F	25	Portugal	4	alien		Maid	Cd
11	Washington Pl	N 14	Cooke Delos	Head	W	M	63	U.S.	63	cit		Retired	

Page from the 1925 New York State Census. The State Census was taken at ten-year intervals from 1825 to 1875 and again in 1892, 1905, 1915, and 1925. It is an example of the wide variety of historical records that have practical, immediate importance for many New Yorkers. Evidence from a certified search of State Census records is accepted by Federal and State Government in lieu of a birth certificate to establish proof of eligibility to secure social security benefits and for other purposes. For many elderly citizens, State Census records have proven invaluable for the protection of their rights. The Census records are also heavily used by genealogists and family history researchers and they are a rich source for community and social history.

The significance of most records, however, is transitory and of short duration; their usefulness rapidly diminishes within a very short time. Moreover, the volume of records created in modern times makes it impractical for society to retain and care for more than a small percentage of them over the long term. The records that are worthy of preservation, special care, and systematic management are designated as "historical records." This term is too often narrowly construed to mean only records of interest to historians. In fact, historical records should be taken to mean those records that contain information providing the best insight into the past and that are the most useful for understanding the present and charting a course for the future. The archivist — broadly defined as anyone who actively and deliberately sets out to identify, save, or manage historical records — has the awesome challenge to "act as the agent of the future in determining its heritage from the past."[1]

Historical records: the individual and group in the stream of time. As futurist Alvin Toffler has emphasized, we live in an era of continuing, tumultuous change:

> The turnover of things in our lives . . . grows even more frenetic. We face a rising flood of throw-away items, impermanent architecture, mobile and modular products, rented goods, and commodities designed for instant death. . . . Throw-away art, one-shot sitcoms, Polaroid snapshots, Xerox copies, and disposable graphics pop up and vanish. Ideas, beliefs, and attitudes rocket into conscious-

[1] "The Archivist's Code," *American Archivist*, 18 (October 1955): 307.

> ness, are challenged, defied, and suddenly fade into nowhere-ness.[2]

In this environment, with so many forces constantly at work to cut us off from what came before, it is important to retain some connection with — and understanding of — our legacy from the past. As historian Carl Degler has written, " . . .all human beings seek to locate themselves in a stream of time; it is history, after all, that provides a sense of personal identity by being the memory of one's neighborhood, community, nation, race, religion, ethnicity, and gender. Far from being irrelevant to people's lives, history is central."[3]

In our rapidly changing world, records are important sources of documentation and the means for transmitting culture from one generation to the next. Veteran researchers have long acknowledged the central role of historical records in recovering information about the past. Carl Becker summed up this relationship when he wrote:

> The event itself once occurred, but as an actual event it has disappeared; so that in dealing with it the only objective reality we can observe or test is some material trace which the event has left — usually a written document.[4]

A manual on historical research advances a slightly different explanation of the value and importance of historical records:

> There is a fascination about handwritten papers from other days, a feeling of genuineness, a personal touch about them that brings one close to the people who produced them. This sense of reality is more than a superficial impression. On it rests the faith that historians have in "original" source materials, and it is basic to a great part of the serious research involving the past. . . .no other type of materials tells us as much about the past as the documents in which the actors of an earlier era recorded their doings, their thoughts, their actions, and their reactions.[5]

Or, as Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., has said of historical letters, such materials constitute "direct, unrehearsed, unprocessed testimony" about the past.[6]

Historians, political scientists, sociologists, geographers, demographers, ethnic group researchers and many other specialists can draw on historical records for information that will enrich their studies. In recent years, for example, growing interest in three research areas has increasingly relied on historical records. First, much present-day research is "people-oriented" and concerns the lives of women, Blacks, ethnic groups, criminals, orphans, and other groups often neglected by historians in the past. Information about such groups has to be gleaned from tax, court, prison, census, and institutional case files and similar records, since these people often left behind little else in the way of historical evidence. Second, a decade ago the Bicentennial of the American Revolution ushered in what has been called the "renaissance in local and community history." The study of the development of communities, and of the relationship of community history to the state and national levels, is leading to a better understanding of both local history and of larger historical themes. A third area of growing interest is genealogy and family history. Thousands of New Yorkers, like other Americans, are searching out their "roots" to achieve a better understanding of their family past and their personal heritage.

Historical records: practical uses. Historical records also have a variety of more immediate, practical uses with everyday implications for all of us.

For example:

- Historical records have legal values important to the individual citizen and to organizations and institutions. Records are used to document agreements and obligations, to substantiate claims, and to back up contentions. Government records on the for-

[2] Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York, 1970): 73 and *The Third Wave* (New York, 1980): 158.

[3] Carl N. Degler, "Remaking American History," *Journal of American History*, 67 (June 1980): 22.

[4] Carl Becker, *Everyman His Own Historian* (Chicago, 1935): 233–234.

[5] Philip C. Brooks, *Research in Archives: The Use of Unpublished Primary Sources* (Chicago, 1969): 1.

[6] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "Mood Music For a Bad Time," *New York Times Book Review*, February 6, 1983: 3.

mulation of legislation, for example, are essential for understanding legislative intent in legal cases that turn on the interpretation of a statute or that tests its constitutionality. Court records, particularly files containing the opinions of the court, are useful to attorneys and judges dealing with similar cases and to legal scholars charting long-term judicial trends. "Vital records," such as those documenting birth, marriage, divorce, and death, are often crucial to establishing individual rights including the inheritance of property and eligibility for government benefits.

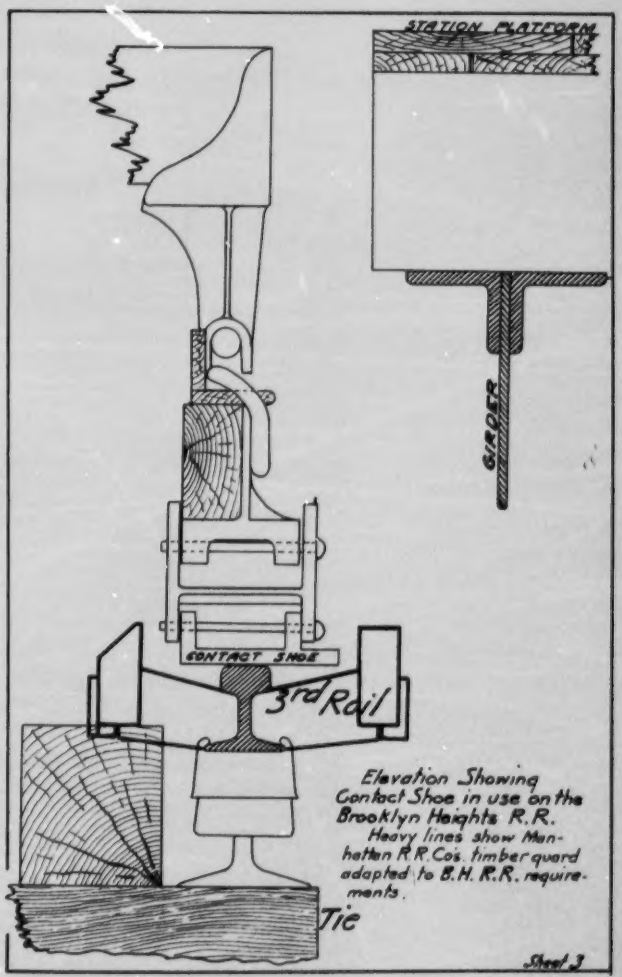
• Institutions and organizations, including governments, use their own archives to study the origins of policy and program decisions, to analyze program development, and to ensure the continuity of administration. Through ready access to their own past, such organizations achieve perspective on their progress and partially compensate for the rapid turnover in personnel that often leads to repeated changes in program direction and to policy discontinuities.

• Historical records are used in the schools. Dozens of New York schools, for example, are using community records in fourth grade social studies classes which focus on local history and local government, and in other social studies and history classes. Such records enable students to understand their community's past, and to relate that past to the present. Use of historical records also develops reading and cognitive skills, and challenges students to analyze evidence and reach their own conclusions from evidence that may be inconclusive and contradictory.

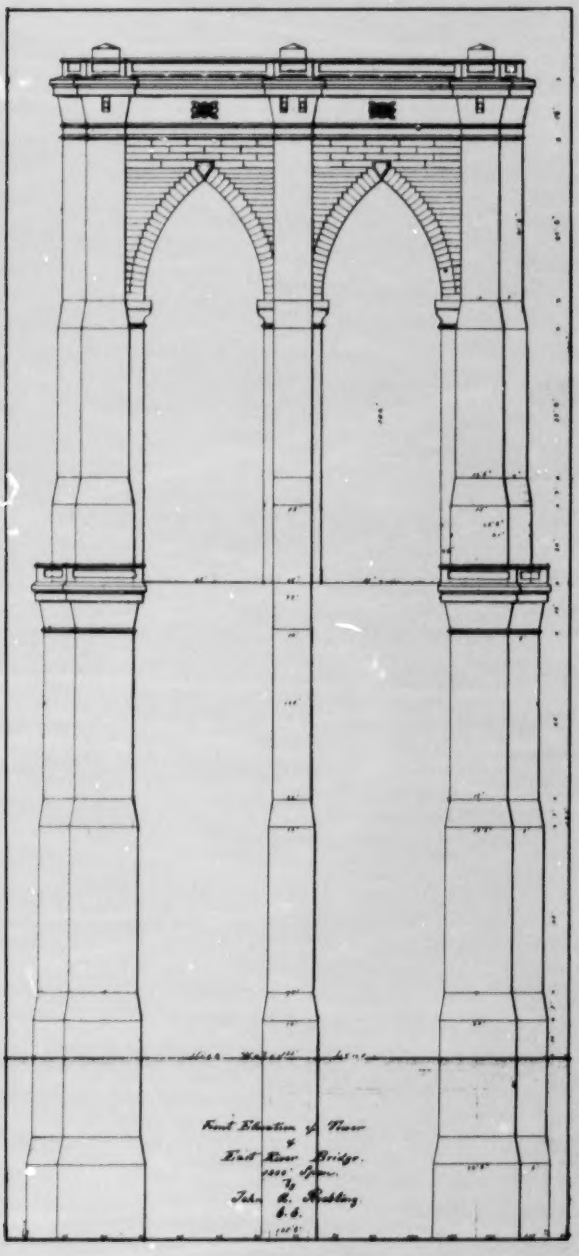
• Historical records help us cope with environmental issues. For instance, engineers and investigators have used land use permits, maps, photographs, and other archival records to study the Love Canal and to determine the location and nature of other toxic dump sites throughout the State.

• Historical records are essential for repairing and maintaining the physical infrastructure. Deterioration of our highways and streets, bridges, and water and sewer lines is one of the most serious problems facing New Yorkers today. Every day, in cities throughout the State, government engineers and public works personnel consult old plans, maps, sketches, reports, and specifications, for information

Historical records, including photographs, plans, and drawings, document the construction of buildings, bridges, and other elements of the State's infrastructure. These records are often invaluable for the preservation, repair, or replacement of these crucial elements of our man-made world. When such records are prematurely destroyed or are unavailable because of improper preservation or administration, the result is inconvenience and increased cost to governments, private institutions, and individual citizens.


STATION PLATFORM
GIRDER
CONTACT SHOE
3rd Rail
Elevation Showing Contact Shoe in use on the Brooklyn Heights R.R.
Heavy lines show Manhattan R.R. Co's. timber guard adapted to B.H.R.R. requirements.
Tie
Sheet 3

Detail for Brooklyn Heights Railroad, c. 1920



Engineering drawing of a tower on the Brooklyn Bridge made by its designer John A. Roebling, c. 1865

on the location, age, or physical characteristics of elements in the State's infrastructure.

• Historical records illustrate and entertain. This is particularly true of historical photographs, which provide our most vivid images of the past. Businesses use historical records in advertising campaigns, newspaper writers draw on them for background for stories, and movie makers and television producers seek them out for background in documentaries and other presentations. Writers of fiction draw on them for portrayals of past conditions and lifestyles.

• Historical records are used in historic preservation. Building owners, engineers, and architects use building files, original blueprints and engineering drawings, and old photographs of buildings being renovated or restored. These records are used, for example, to determine the original appearance of the buildings and the location and type of their framework, electrical wiring, and plumbing.

• Historical records are used to document land ownership. Land grants, maps, deeds, and other records are used by public authorities, corporations, and individual citizens to determine property boundaries and ownership.

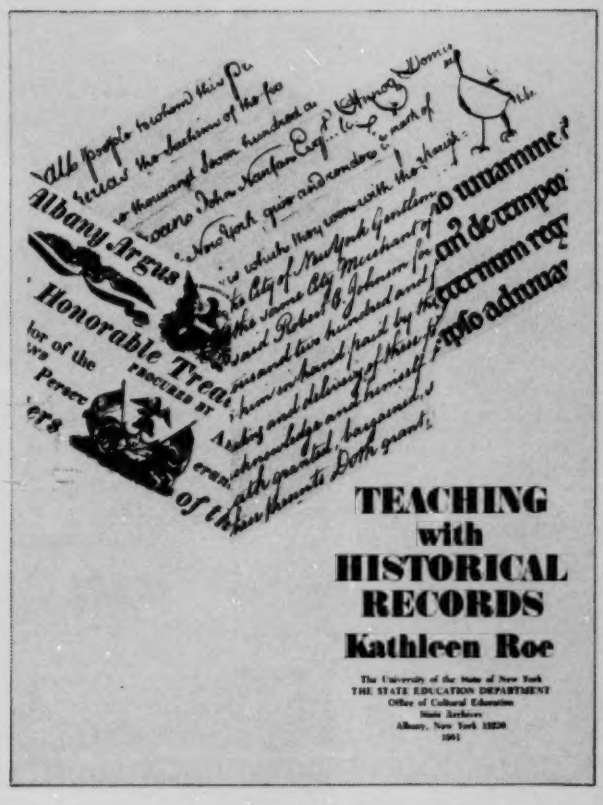
• Study of historical records can support improved health care. Medical researchers study patient records to understand genetic and familial diseases that are transmitted from generation to generation, and to trace the spread of contagious diseases within geographical regions. Such analysis can lead to major breakthroughs in health research that can save lives.

Historical records: a public responsibility. Historical records are the responsibility of us all, not just the employees of archives, libraries, and historical societies. All citizens, therefore, need to take an active interest in the sound management of historical records. Our governments, however, have a special obligation to ensure that historical records are identified and maintained and are accessible to all citizens. State government has a direct self-interest in maintaining a record of its own activities and the activities of New York's local governments. Preservation and availability of government records also increase the accountability of the government and thereby raise public confidence in government officials, an important need today. The State government should also

accept a broader responsibility to promote the sound management of all historical records on behalf of the public. Through its officers, it can do so by:

- Noting the value and significance of historical records, and understanding the problems of their present management.
- Bringing to the attention of citizens the importance of historical records and the benefits to be realized from their sound administration.
- Encouraging all who have charge of historical records to recognize the importance of their mission as superintendents of the past for the future and of the need for the systematic care of the records in their custody.
- Advising and assisting in improved historical records programming through appropriate state agencies.

Historical records are our documentary heritage and they form a great deal of our legacy from the past. They are a key to a "usable past." Their management and preservation are important public concerns.



The covers of two manuals published recently to assist elementary and secondary school teachers in the use of historical records in classroom teaching. New York's new fourth grade social studies curriculum emphasizes an understanding of the development of the student's immediate community. Historical records documenting local government, institutions, and individuals have become important sources for this curriculum. Historical records are also receiving increasing use in New York classes in State and national history and in a variety of continuing education programs. Documents from real events offer a basis for analysis and interpretation that is hard to match in textbook discussions.

V

HISTORICAL RECORDS IN NEW YORK: AN OVERVIEW

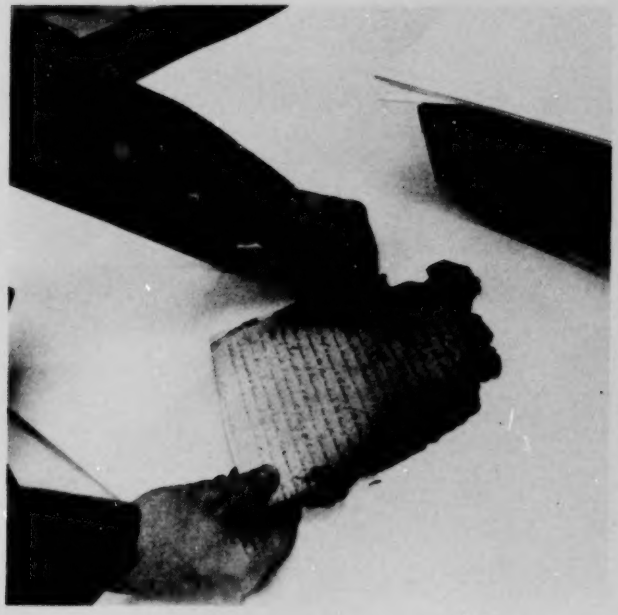
The historical records of New York's State and local governments, of cultural, educational, business, labor, religious, social, and political institutions, and of individual citizens, contain the primary evidence of New York's own experience and of its contributions to the larger society. The history of the Empire State is not only exciting, it is also unique. Our State served as the entry point for millions of immigrants; it pioneered in the development of industry, transportation, and cities; and it led the way in important political, social, and economic reforms. Much of New York's historical development also has been characterized by great racial, ethnic, and social diversity.

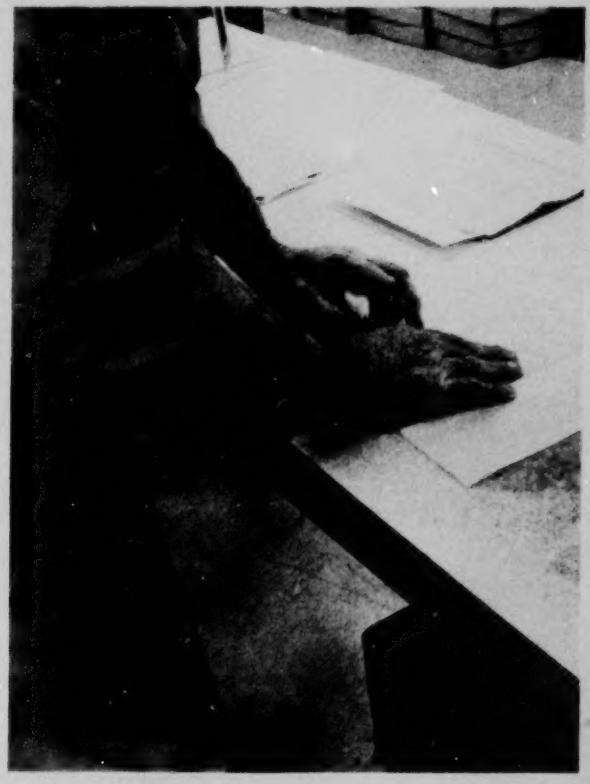
New Yorkers undoubtedly have created more historical records than the people of any other state in the nation. New York has certainly developed more historical records programs than any other state—over two thousand historical societies, libraries, archives, and other institutions that actively collect and maintain historical records. It is difficult, however, to generalize about such activities in New York. On the one hand, the State has some of the Nation's most impressive historical records repositories, such as the New York Public Library, the New-York Historical Society, and the Cornell University libraries, and there are an increasing number of archives maintained directly by the institutions that create the records. Relatively new, New York's archival program is already recognized as one of the most active in the Na-

tion, although New York was the last state to pass a state archival law, and its new program is still at an early stage in key areas. Many of New York's historical records programs are poorly developed and poorly supported. Their rate of development and degree of accomplishment overall have been very uneven, and there are great inconsistencies in the level and quality of programs across the State.

A. State government records. This mixed pattern of strengths and weaknesses is nowhere more apparent than in the case of Colonial and State government records. The State's formal archival program is only five years old, but concern for government records goes back to Dutch and English Colonial authorities who were determined to preserve key legal documents and to ensure continuity of government through maintenance of administrative records. After the Revolution, the new State government provided for preservation of the State Constitution, original laws, and other essential legal documents by depositing them in the office of Secretary of State. Early in the nineteenth century, the Legislature arranged for copying and publishing documents in European government archives which pertained to New York's Colonial past. Another law transferred selected Colonial records from the Secretary of State to the State Library for safekeeping and, later, the Legislature authorized all State departments to send archival records to the Library on an ongoing basis. The lawmakers failed, however, to provide the Library with the legal mandate, storage facilities, or staff adequate to develop a comprehensive State archival program or even to care for records it did receive. The Library's program received a serious setback in 1911 when a disastrous fire in the Capitol destroyed many of its holdings.

Legislative action in 1950 established a procedure for the legal disposition of valueless records within





A Revolutionary War document (above) in the State Archives. As with many other Colonial and Early Statehood records, this item was damaged in the 1911 State Capitol fire and still awaits conservation treatment, or copying to preserve the information in the record. Limited conservation work on early court records (right) began in the State Archives in late 1982.

the Executive Branch but still did not address the issue of archives. Not until twenty-one years later did the Legislature create a State Archives, in the State Education Department, with authority to "acquire, appraise, preserve, and make available" official records with continuing value to the State and to scholars and others interested in historical and other research. However, the program received neither funds nor space until 1978, when the Legislature provided an initial appropriation for the Archives and space became available in the new Cultural Education Center, in the Empire State Plaza government complex. Even after that, program development proceeded slowly. The Archives lacked sufficient staff and other resources to deal simultaneously with the State's 350-year archival backlog, to deal with new records, and to serve adequately a growing number of researchers. The task of identifying the State's archival records was made more difficult because few Executive Branch offices had even developed records retention and disposition schedules under the 1950 statute, and none of the three branches of State government had developed an effective records management program.

Nevertheless, during the five years from 1978 to 1983, the Archives did take in and establish rudimentary controls over nearly 30,000 cubic feet of records, mostly from State executive agencies. Its holdings are strong in such areas as land records and the records of welfare and penal institutions. They are very weak, however, in others including legislative and judicial records, and executive records for many important State functions such as mental hygiene, the regulation of public utilities, and the executive budget process. Overall, the holdings of the State Archives do not yet reflect the age, size, diversity, and importance of the State and its government. Sound basic procedures have been developed for arranging and describing records and for responding to reference inquiries. But other key activities, such as preservation, microfilming, electronic data processing, audiovisual records, and programs for the public have not been inaugurated or have only just begun to receive some attention. Archival program resources are far from adequate for such a large and complex government. By 1983, New York's per capita spending for its State archival records was still only about ten percent of the average of well-developed programs in other states. Furthermore, the lack of sound records management programs throughout State government continues to severely handicap its archival program.

B. Local government records. For over three centuries, New York's local governments have provided essential police, justice, welfare, education, and other services. Local government archives document the development of these activities and contain much additional information on New York's communities and local institutions, and the lives of its citizens. Official concern for essential local government records is shown by State laws, including some carried over from Colonial days, mandating the creation and maintenance of key records such as land deeds and wills. Other statutes designate official records custodians; a section of the Town Law, for example, identifies the Town Clerk as the legal custodian of all town records. In many communities, the Clerk and other officials have made and continue to make conscientious efforts to preserve and manage their archival records. However, despite these good intentions and some strong individual local government archival programs, most records custodians lack the time, training, and other resources to give records the attention warranted by their value to local government itself and to the larger community.

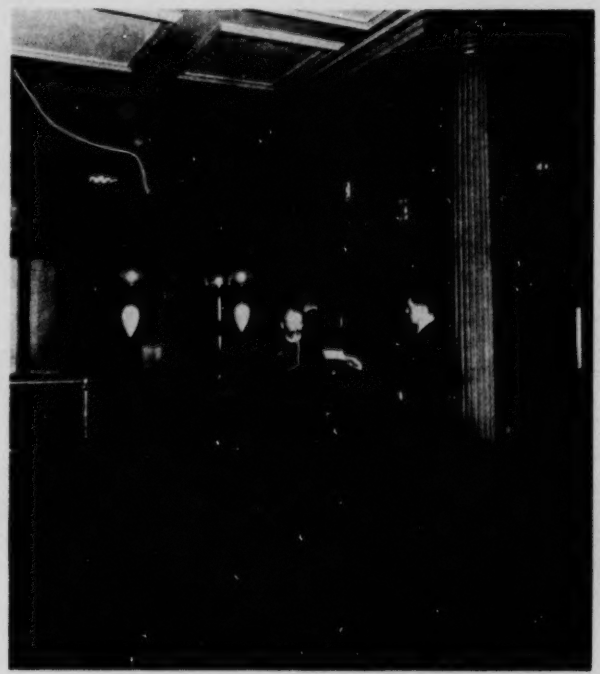
In the Colonial and Early Statehood periods, New York's local governments were relatively simple, and their records were often maintained in the homes or businesses of government clerks. Frequently, the records were stored under poor conditions and were thrown out when storage space became a problem. By the early twentieth century, historians were demanding State action to ensure the preservation of archival records. The tragic 1911 Capitol fire heightened legislative interest and led to passage of a series of laws requiring local government officials to provide secure storage for their records and to obtain the consent of the Commissioner of Education before disposing of them. The Education Department was also authorized to inspect local government records, and later legislation required the Department to provide general records management advisory services to local governments. The Department's authority extended to all local governments in the State except New York City.

Cover of the City of Rochester's 1981 *Guide to Selected Archival Records*. Several of New York's municipalities have discovered the value to the government and to the community of a well-administered records management and archives program. The City of Rochester, which opened a new records management and archives center in 1983, is a leading example.

State supervision has not, however, ensured the development of sound programs to save local government archives. Education Department intervention has been handled by a series of offices and, since 1976, by the State Archives. The Department's attention has focused in recent years primarily on records management issues rather than directly on archival records—a reaction to pleas from local governments for assistance in managing the growing volume of records resulting from the increasingly complex and expanding functions of local government in New York. The Department has produced detailed records retention and disposition schedules, and publications on fire protection, inactive records storage, and indexing systems. But it has not produced a master listing of archival records, nor provided publications, training on archival management, or other services to ensure the preservation and use of archival records in our local governments.

The State's only recent program explicitly designed to improve management of local government archives was the Local Government Archives Project, 1979–1983, which the State Archives carried out in conjunction with the State Historical Records Advisory Board. Under this project, grant funds secured from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission were used to provide start-up funding for several model local government archival programs, which received technical assistance from State Archives staff. This statewide project, however, established only a few sound models. It also demonstrated that stronger records management efforts, broader public support, and improved State Archives advisory services would be required to build good archival programs in most local governments. The Local Government Archives Project and other efforts have been only partially successful in improving local government archival records management; there is a need for a major expansion of effort in this direction.

The Assessment and Reporting Project did not include a study of New York City's program, and the findings and recommendations on local government records in this report do not cover New York City. Management of New York City's archival records has remained a responsibility of the City. The City has had a records management and archival program since 1940. In 1977, the City Council passed a law establishing a new Department of Records and Information Services that integrates City records management, archives, and agency libraries into one comprehensive program. This statute presents a model for other local governments to establish combined records management/archival programs. The New York City program's resources have been increased significantly since 1977, and renovation work for the facility that will hold the City's archives is nearly complete. The New York City program provides further evidence that a comprehensive records program can be built where there is adequate support based on government's understanding of the cost efficiency and service benefits of such a program. The City and County of Albany, the Town of Amherst, and the City of Rochester provide other excellent examples for local governments in New York State.



Fourth National Bank, New York City, c. 1904.

Check Department, Chase National Bank, 1946.

Two photographs from the Archives of the Chase Manhattan Bank, one of the major corporate archives in New York. Such programs provide information to the parent company about past policies and practices as well as materials for corporate public relations programs. Corporate archives, such as those at Chase, Corning Glass and the New York Stock Exchange, are also important sources for understanding the economic development of New York, the nation and the world.

C. Nongovernment historical records. In examining private as opposed to government records, the picture becomes still more complex. Nongovernment historical records programs have existed in New York since the early nineteenth century. The first were those administered by private historical societies; the Albany Institute of History and Art (1791) and the New-York Historical Society (1804), for example, originally collected only books and newspapers but soon branched out to include historical manuscripts as well. By the mid-nineteenth century, those pioneering institutions were being joined by city, county, town, and village historical societies which usually concentrated on collecting the papers of local political and social leaders. The number of historical agencies increased rapidly after World War II, and particularly during the period of the American Revolution Bicentennial.

By the late nineteenth century, public libraries in many New York communities were also collecting community history materials. These libraries, which range in size from small town facilities to major urban and regional research libraries, often collect historical records to complement their books, newspapers, and other materials.

By the mid-twentieth century, a third major collecting group was emerging—college and university libraries. These often gather historical records to support faculty and student research. Such materials frequently are integrated with broader library collections, including the institution's own archives, faculty papers, and rare books. Some of the State's major

universities—e.g., Cornell, Columbia, Syracuse, and New York University—have developed collections on particular subjects that are national in scope.

A fourth important category of nongovernment historical records programs is that of institutional archives. In most cases, such programs have been established primarily to serve their parent institution by providing documentation of its activities for administrative and legal purposes. Notable institutional archives in New York include those of the IBM Corporation, the New York Stock Exchange, the Chase Manhattan Bank, the Corning Glass Company, the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center, Trinity Church, the New York Zoological Society, and the New York Botanical Garden. Most of these archives are of very recent origin, an encouraging development demonstrating that important institutions are beginning to accept responsibility for their own archival records.

Subject-oriented programs constitute yet another category of historical records programs. In most cases, these have been initiated and supported by institutions or organizations interested in preserving the documentation of specific groups or activities. Examples include records of the Jewish experience collected by the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Agudath Israel of America, and the Leo Baeck Institute; materials on Black history held by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library and by the Afro-American Historical Society of the Niagara Frontier; materials on the New York canals in the Canal Museum in Syracuse; labor records gathered by the Robert F. Wagner Archives at New York University and by the Labor-Management Documentation Center of the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University; and the Dance Collection at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. Another type of subject-oriented center focuses on a particular profession, such as the American Institute of Physics and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers' Center for the History of Electrical Engineering. These centers do not collect records but coordinate their collection by appropriate repositories.

The nongovernment historical records programs, described briefly above, are diverse in scope and size, origin, institutional setting, and type of holdings. But questionnaire returns from the Statewide Assessment project and other research reveal some of their general characteristics. Most are part of larger institutions whose officers rank historical records well below other functions of the institution. At least partly for this reason, most of their historical records programs have very modest budgets or none at all. Most budgets are either not increasing or are not increasing rapidly enough to keep pace with inflation and with their volume of records and researchers.

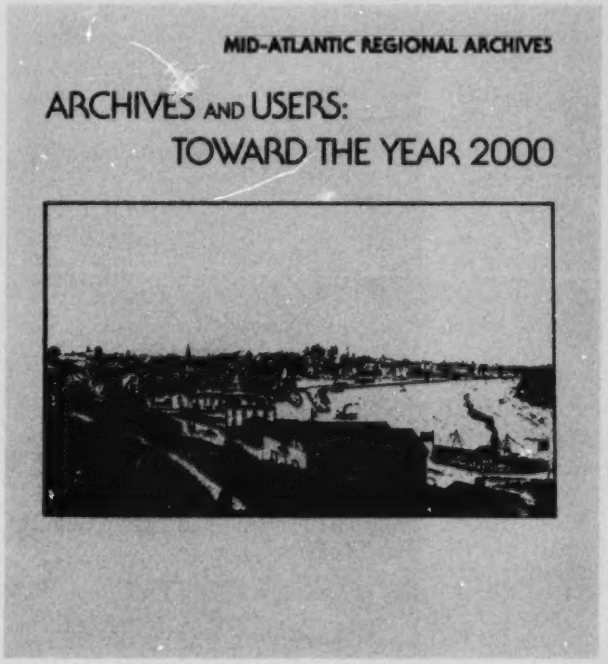
Small staffs are the norm at these repositories, and it is not unusual for people to be hired only part-time. Most staffs have not grown in recent years, and they seem unlikely to do so in the near future without some outside intervention. Only a minority of programs have staff with specialized training in the handling of manuscripts or archives. Few of the programs have developed a clear mission statement or a collection policy, and many — particularly smaller historical societies and libraries — accept records indiscriminately within very broad categories. For a majority of programs, records are only partially processed, and finding aids are undeveloped, or exist, even in preliminary form, for only a portion of the holdings. Storage condtiions are inadequate for most repositories: temperature, humidity, and security are not controlled and most of the records are not stored in appropriate containers.

D. Common problems/coordinated solutions. A majority of New York's historical records programs face similar problems and challenges. Despite this, New York has developed a tradition of individual programs operating separately rather than pulling together toward common objectives. Contributing factors include the State's size and diversity, the New York City-upstate dichotomy, the number and variety of historical records programs, the lack of a statewide historical society or archival association, and the absence in the past of strong State government leadership. To date, there has been little discussion among repositories about the possibility of agreed-upon solutions to common problems. Collaborative projects and cooperative approaches have been few in number, isolated, and usually temporary.

There have been, however, a number of positive

developments — most during the past decade — that may point the way toward a greater degree of cooperation and coordination to strengthen historical records programming:

- The State Historical Records Advisory Board was created in 1976. In carrying out its broad mandate to develop plans for improving the collection and management of historical records, it has begun to provide a forum for discussion of statewide issues and problems.
- The recent development of the State Archives has begun to raise the visibility of historical records issues among government leaders in Albany, and has brought together a staff of professional archivists able to give at least modest assistance to other historical records programs through workshops, conferences, and consultation.
- The Local Government Archives Project established or greatly strengthened a number of local government archival programs, including major programs such as those in Rochester and Albany. The project also drew the attention of many public officials to the importance of archives, and provided important information about conditions needed to establish successful programs. The development of the Department of Records and Information Services in New York City has provided additional evidence of cost-effective records management programs linked to archival services.
- The National Historical Publications and Records Commission's records grants provided over one million dollars to initiate, strengthen, or expand historical records program activities. NHPRC grants supported three major New York statewide projects: the Local Government Archives Project, the survey of historical resources by Cornell University, and this Historical Records Assessment and Reporting Project. The requirement that the State Historical Records Advisory Board review and comment on all New York applications to the NHPRC provided the Board with an opportunity to learn more about historical records conditions and to formulate an initial statement of priorities. Grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities also supported projects of broad significance, such as the archival training program at New York University, the conservation training program at Columbia, and the Brooklyn Rediscovery program of the Brooklyn Educational and Cultural Alliance.
- Cornell University began a detailed survey of historical records, with support from NHPRC grants and other funds. This Historical Documents Inventory (HDI), now completed for over half of the State, has published computer-generated guides with detailed subject indexes for each county surveyed. The guides have led to broader research use of the historical records in hundreds of repositories. The survey also uncovered many important historical records that had been forgotten, neglected, or lost in repositories and it led to improved care for some collections. The HDI has also prompted initial discussions among New York archivists about ways to develop and maintain a statewide data base with information on historical records and records programs. Such information has tremendous potential for cooperative collections strategies among repositories.



The Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC) is a multi-state association for individuals engaged in historical records work. New York has no statewide archival organization, although associations exist within several regions.

• The Long Island Archives Conference was established for historical records personnel in that region. The Archivists' Round Table of Metropolitan New York brings together people with historical records interests in New York City. The Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC) was established to include all the states from New York to Virginia, and within MARAC a "New York Caucus" has evolved to discuss New York issues and propose special projects to benefit our State. The informal Lake Ontario Archives Conference has provided an annual meeting opportunity for upstate New Yorkers interested in historical records.

• The operation of the Regional Research Library Resources Systems ("3R's") demonstrated the potential of a statewide system of regionally based service centers to ensure intraregional library cooperation and sharing of resources. The development of two regional services for historical agenices — the Regional Conference of Historical Agencies, serving central New York, and the Federation of Historical services, serving the Capital District — demonstrated the advantages of providing such advisory services on a regional basis. The operation of these library systems and historical service agencies offers a basis for discussion of how historical records services might be provided on a regional basis.

• Several agencies have supported broad public programs to raise public consciousness about the uses of historical records. The New York State Council on the Arts funded exhibitions of documents, provided a number of historical agencies with funds for general administration, and supported historical service programs such as the Regional Conference of Historical Agencies. The New York Council for the Humanities backed projects that contributed to public understanding of historical records as sources for humanistic research. Within the State Education Department, the State Library's leadership position among libraries and the State Museum's services to historical agencies both have strengthened local programs focusing public attention on the importance of cultural resources generally. The State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation has developed imaginative uses of historic documents at State historic sites. All of these developments have led to a broader public appreciation of the cultural value of historical records.

• Professional training opportunities were expanded with the initiation of an archival training program at New York University, a conservation management training program at Columbia University, and archival courses at other universities.

• New York State joined the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) in Massachusetts as an associate member, making the Center's conservation services available to all New York institutions at reduced cost. Workshops offered in New York by NEDCC personnel introduced New York custodians of historical records to basic preservation concerns.

All these developments are encouraging, and they suggest opportunities for more systematic and cooperative programming to improve historical records efforts throughout the State. While this progress is cause for satisfaction, every new development also reveals in greater detail some of New York's outstanding historical records problems. The Local Government Archives Program, for example, revealed much about the process of setting up municipal archival programs, but also demonstrated that considerable local resources and improved State advisory services are needed to establish such programs and keep them going. NHPRC grant applications illustrated that many important records are inadequately arranged, described, and preserved — and how ill-equipped and ill-financed many repositories are to administer them. And the Cornell survey, based on many more examples, confirmed the need for better repository performance in basic archival activities. The "3R's" and the regional history federations could not have begun or succeeded without substantial new State funding; and additional support will be required to carry out some of the recommendations in this Advisory Board report.

New York's historical records are among its most important cultural assets. They can constitute a "usable past" for New Yorkers who recognize the need to understand the past in order to address the challenges of the future. There are some hopeful signs that the management of our documentary heritage is improving, but there are also causes for alarm. Significant historical records needs cry out for attention. Concerned New Yorkers must work vigorously for historical programs worthy of the Empire State.

VI

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The Board's findings and recommendations are the heart of this report. They have been developed for each of the four broad areas studied by the Assessment and Reporting Project:*

A. STATE GOVERNMENT RECORDS (pp. 34–42)

B. LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS (pp. 43–51)

C. NONGOVERNMENT HISTORICAL RECORDS (pp. 52–57)

D. COMMON PROBLEMS/COORDINATED SOLUTIONS (pp. 58–70)

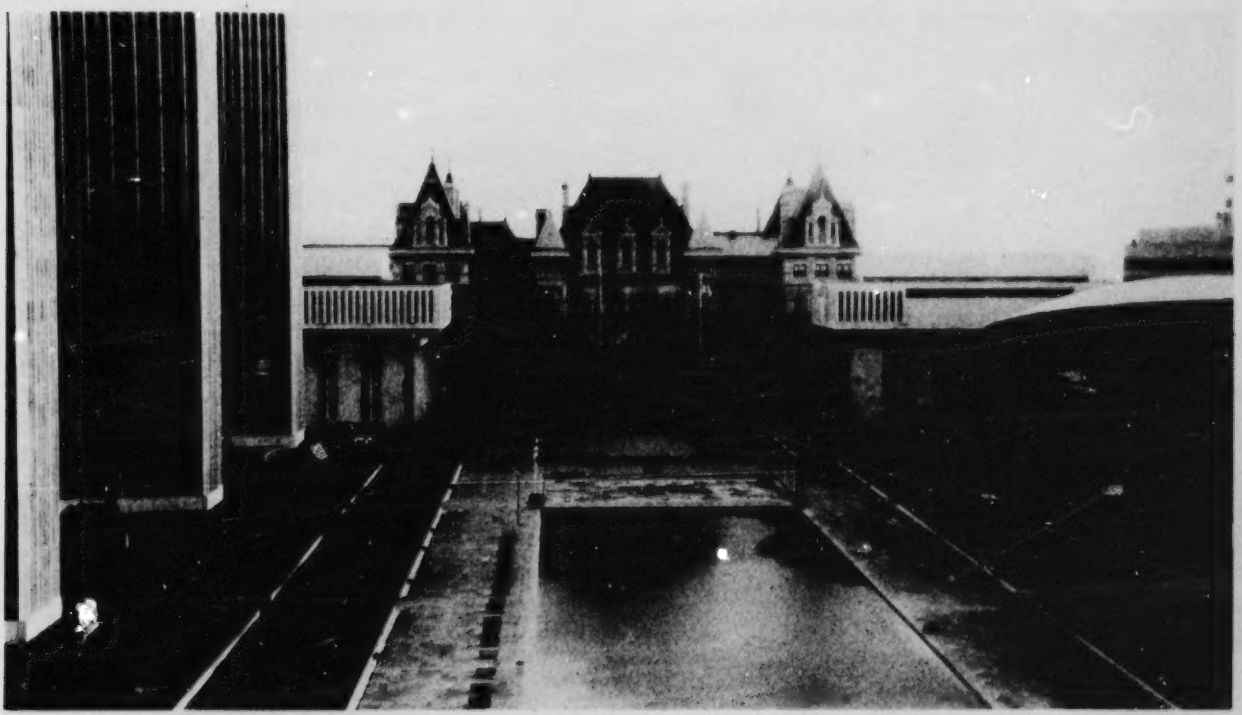
* For background information on how the Board arrived at these findings and recommendations, see Section III of this report.

A. STATE GOVERNMENT RECORDS

Findings

1. Records management in New York State government is weak or nonexistent; without sound records management programs, an adequate archival program is impossible. The complexity and range of New York State government operations have led to the creation of massive records that should be systematically managed in the interest of government efficiency and economy. The records should be well organized and readily available to officials to ensure sound program administration and continuity, as well as government accountability. Selected records should be retained because of their long-term value in documenting important State government decisions, functions, and services, or because of the information they contain on the people, groups, and institutions that the government counted, taxed, licensed, regulated, supervised, incarcerated, or with whom it otherwise came in contact in the course of carrying out its legally mandated duties.

Systematic identification and retention of these archival records require a sound records management program which covers the creation, organization, maintenance, use, and legal disposition of records. A comprehensive program includes: guidelines for the creation and use of forms, correspondence, and other records; filing and indexing systems and other means of ensuring easy, rapid access to records information; adoption and use of modern technology in information creation, storage, and manipulation, particularly microfilm and automated data-processing systems;



This view from the State Archivist's office in the Cultural Education Center, Empire State Plaza, symbolizes the Archives' responsibility for the identification and care of the archival records of all three branches of State Government.

microfilming of selected records for security, ease of access, long-term preservation, and elimination of bulky records; and systematic disposition of records.

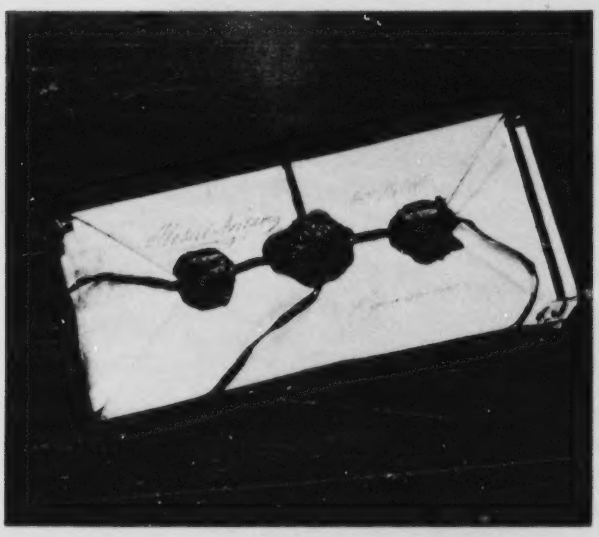
Of all these elements, disposition is the most essential from an archival standpoint. This process is based on inventory of records and development of comprehensive records retention and disposition schedules, with retention periods carefully established on the basis of the administrative, fiscal, legal, and long-term historical or other research value of the records. Records of permanent value should be designated on the schedules for eventual placement in the State Archives.

None of the three branches of State government has developed an adequate records management program, and this problem has severely restricted the development of a systematic aproach to archival records. In the Executive Branch, Section 186 of the State Finance Law, dating from 1950, provides the legal basis for a records management program, but no comprehensive program has been developed. The statute prescribes the procedures for disposition of executive agency records and gives the Office of General Services (OGS) broad rule-making authority to carry out the act. OGS has promulgated a regulation making the agencies responsible for operation of "an active program for the efficient management, preservation, and disposition" of records, but it has not secured the resources or provided the leadership for development of such programs. At the time the present report was prepared, OGS had only one professional position dedicated to records management for the entire Executive Branch of government. By comparison to other states, California has seven, Pennsylvania has eight, and Georgia has ten. OGS records management activities are largely limited to operating a records center and coordinating the records disposition request procedure. OGS rules require each agency to appoint a Records Officer, but these people usually work part-time; their functions have not been well defined either by OGS or by their respective agencies, and they receive little support, assistance, or training from OGS. With few exceptions, State agency records management programs are either nonexistent or underdeveloped.

The most critical aspect of such a program — a methodical approach to the scheduling and disposition of records — is missing in almost all agencies. Records disposition requests come mostly from individual offices in agencies asking for permission to dispose of specific caches of records that have become storage problems. Section 186 of the State Finance Law provides for review of these requests under the coordination of OGS by the Division of the Budget and the Departments of Law and Audit and Control as well as by the Education Department. However, only the Education Department pays close attention to these disposition requests. State Archives personnel, acting on behalf of the Commissioner of Education, attempt to appraise records series to determine their long-term research value. But they can do so only on a reactive, piecemeal basis rather than in the context of total documentation of an office, agency, or function.

The need for records management is even more pronounced in the Legislature and the State Courts. Section 186 of the State Finance Law does not apply to either of these branches. Disposition of legislative records is governed by Section 22 of the Legislative Law, an outdated statute that establishes general schedules for only a few housekeeping records and does not take archival considerations into account. Both houses of the Legislature have made very limited attempts to establish partial records management systems. The Senate has a small unit to handle microfilming of legislative bills and a few other items, and to run a small records storage center. The Assembly some years ago established a correspondence control unit in the Speaker's office. This unit developed a general plan for a broader records management effort, but the plan was never implemented. As a result, the complex and important records of the Legislature do not receive systematic management, the Legislature's own long-term information needs are not carefully addressed, and there is no system for identifying and transferring historically valuable legislative materials to the State Archives or otherwise ensuring their continuing retention.

In addition, the differences between Freedom of Information requirements for Executive Branch records and for records of the Legislature have discouraged transfer of important legislative records to the Archives, which is located in the Executive Branch. Basically, the law provides for easier, less



A single document and one of approximately 6,000 boxes of Colonial and Early Statehood records of New York's highest civil courts. These pre-1847 files, transferred to the State Archives by the Court of Appeals in 1982, comprise perhaps the most important body of judicial records in the nation, next to the early records of the U.S. Supreme Court. As with other valuable early New York court records, these require conservation treatment and description if they are to survive and be made available for research. The identification and care of records of enduring value throughout the Unified Court System is one of New York's largest archival challenges.

restrictive access to Executive Branch records than to legislative records. An arrangement has yet to be reached assuring the Legislature of Archives administration of legislative records according to guidelines acceptable to the Legislature.

There is also no statute that clearly governs the disposition of the records of the State Courts. In the absence of clear statutory guidance, the Chief Administrative Judge of the Office of Court Administration has issued general records disposition guidelines that leave out important record series and largely ignore archival considerations. There is no central control over records retention and disposition by the courts and, to deal with the increasing problem of storing bulky records, some court officials have turned to indiscriminate use of microfilming.

Two recent developments may point the way to improvement. First, through a 1982 order of the Court of Appeals, the voluminous records of some of the State's higher level courts for the Colonial and Early Statehood era were transferred to the Archives. A few series of more recent Court of Appeals records have also been scheduled for transfer to the Archives on a continuing basis. Second, in May 1983 the office of Court Administration and the State Archives, prompted by an early draft of the Advisory Board's assessment report, discussed records problems, some options for improved management of archival records, and an agreement to mutually explore these problems and options in the future. These developments, however, are only initial steps toward addressing the increasingly serious problem of State court records.

2. The State Archives program is administered along sound lines but is underdeveloped. The State Archives program, in operation for five years, has made notable progress in developing sound policies and procedures for carrying out its broad legal mandate under Section 142 of the State Education Law to acquire, preserve, and make available the State government's archival records. Of necessity the Archives has concentrated on Executive Branch records and has only recently begun to consider the archival records of the Legislature and the Judiciary. The Archives has developed sound internal procedures for reviewing and analyzing records disposition requests

from State agencies. This program operates as well as can be expected, given the problems imposed by the records management deficiencies discussed above. Reference procedures have been developed to keep pace with the current level of reference requests from researchers.

Significant new resources are needed, however, if the Archives is to adequately handle New York's 350-year archival backlog, keep pace with newly received records, and develop other critical areas. More specifically:

A. The Archives lacks the resources to take custody of older records *and* keep up with appraising newer records to identify those with archival value.

B. The Archives does not have the resources to analyze and appraise machine-readable and audiovisual records, which are being created in growing quantities by State Government offices. A large and important part of the present and future archival record is therefore likely to be lost.

C. Arrangement and description at the current rate will enable the Archives, over a period of many years, to address the unprocessed records backlog at a summary level of description, but not to keep pace with new accessions or to undertake more detailed descriptions even where essential. The lack of staff resources and of an automated system for maintaining intellectual control over records impedes progress on this work.

D. In the critical areas of conservation and microfilming, the Archives has developed sound procedures and possesses much of the required facilities and equipment, despite some deficiencies. It lacks staff, however, to implement such programs for the records the Archives already holds and those it is continually acquiring. Without additional staff, the Archives cannot ensure the survival of the records or the information in them.

E. Staff and other resources available for reference work can keep pace with current demand but cannot meet expected growth in the future — especially as finding aids and public information programs are developed to facilitate broader use of the records.

F. The Archives' holdings are underutilized. The Archives serves researchers on a reactive basis; that is, it provides assitance to a relatively small group of citizens who seek out its services and holdings. However, it has not developed programs to acquaint a broader range of potential users and the general public with its holdings, or to make information about its holdings available throughout the State. Thus its holdings are largely untapped for historical research on public policy and other areas.

G. Recently enacted privacy legislation, due to take effect in 1984, does not contain essential provisions that allow research use of certain archival records that contain personal data. The law lacks provisions that would allow access to such records after passage of an appropriate amount of time or under controlled conditions that protect from disclosure the identities of individuals named in the records.

H. The Archives' physical facilities in the Cultural Education Center in Albany are deficient in several ways. There is an alarming potential for loss of records in case of fire because the Archives' storage facility lacks fire walls, sprinklers, and other fire suppression systems, and there are no definite plans for fighting fires. The smoke detection system is not periodically tested to ensure its reliability. There are continuing problems with roof leaks and with significant temperature and humidity fluctuations in the Archives' stacks. The facility lacks a satisfactory fumigation chamber to treat records that may bring insects, fungi, or other organic contaminants into the Archives. It has no air filtering system to inhibit the spread of atmospheric pollutants that cause chemical deterioration of materials. Moreover, the Archives lacks laboratory and storage facilities and equipment for photographic records, sound and video materials, and tapes, discs, and other machine-readable records.

I. At the current rate of accessioning, the Archives' storage space on the 11th floor of the Cultural Education Center will be exhausted in a few years and additional space will be needed.

Recommendations

1. A comprehensive records management program should be developed for State government records. The Governor, the Legislature, and the Courts, together and individually, should work for the development of an effective, comprehensive records management program for State government records to promote their more efficient and economical management, and ensure the identification and preservation of those with archival value.

During the Board's discussions of how best to achieve this goal, the Chair of the Board's committee on State government records recommended creation of a new agency that would combine the State's records management and archival programs. He argued that a combined program would improve management and control of records during the entire course of their existence, promote better identification of archival records, and attract increased support because of its efficiency and cost savings. This proposal is consistent with the policy statement of the National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators in its "Principles for State Archival and Records Management Agencies." The Board considered the merits of this approach but decided to recommend that, for the time being at least, the State should continue its archival program under the aegis of the cultural education unit in the State Education Department and the Executive Branch records management program in the Office of General Services. However, the Board recommends that the proposal for a combined approach be reconsidered in three to five years if there is not substantial improvement in both the records management and the archival programs.

For the immediate future, the Board recommends the following:

A. Section 186 of the State Finance Law, Section 22 of the Legislative Law, and other statutes pertaining to records in all three branches of State government should be clarified and consolidated.

B. Legal procedures for the preservation or disposal of records of public authorities and public benefit corporations should be clarified to provide that: (1) the records of public authorities and public benefit corporations involving New York State and a neighboring state or Canada, and those operating within the entire State and/or carrying out statewide functions, are *State* government records and therefore subject to the provisions of Section 186 of the State Finance Law; and (2) the records of authorities and public benefit corporations operating within the boundaries of a municipal corporation (other than New York City) or within a region that crosses local government boundaries are *local* government records, and therefore subject to the provisions of Section 65-b of the Public Officers Law, which governs the disposition of local government records.

C. Statutes should clarify and spell out the records management responsibilities of the Office of General Services, and of the State agencies themselves, including the duties of agency records officers. As a minimum, the law should require OGS to: (1) provide training and support for agency records officers; (2) provide publications and workshops on records management techniques; (3) sponsor and coordinate surveys of agency records; and (4) develop records schedules that cover all records. With this clear legal mandate and the incentives of effective government and overall cost savings, the Commissioner of General Services should assign additional personnel and other new resources, and provide the leadership, needed to carry out this responsibility.

D. The Governor should make known throughout the Executive Branch his support for a much stronger records management program to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of government operations. He should give special attention to the management of records in Executive Chamber offices, particularly to the need to work with the State Archives to complete systematic retention and disposition schedules to ensure that historically valuable Executive Chamber series are retained from his administration for transfer to the Archives at the appropriate time.

E. Each house of the Legislature, in cooperation with the State Archives, should initiate a study of its records-keeping systems. This study should recommend a replacement for Section 22 of the Legislative Law, a more systematic approach to records management and to identification and preservation of archival records, a records management office in each house, a system for regular transfer of archival records to the State Archives, and mutually acceptable guidelines and procedures for access to archival records.

F. The Office of Court Administration, in cooperation with the State Archives, should establish a special Judicial Records Study Committee (see Recommendation No. 7 in Area B of this Section, below). This Committee should include court officials, legal scholars, professional archivists and records administrators, and local government officials (e.g., county clerks) responsible for maintenance of State court records under the Unified Court Act. This committee should study the Unified Court System's records-keeping practices and develop recommendations for a records and information management program that includes systematic identification and preservation of archival records and a separate records management unit. The recommendations should include a provision that no archival records may be disposed of without consent of the State Archives. Resources should be provided immediately for the Office of Court Administration to hire a professional records management-archives specialist to coordinate records management and archives program development and to provide liaison with State Archives.

G. The issue of access to archival records should be addressed by statutory changes: (1) adding the State Archivist as a member of the Committee on Open Government; (2) providing that all State government records more than 75 years old be open without any access restrictions; (3) permitting access to confidential case files in State Archives under conditions and safeguards established by the State Archivist (see Recommendation No. 3-E, below); and (4) clarifying provisions for access to legislative records in the Archives. (See Recommendation No. 9 in area B, below.)

2. A State Records Management Council, similar to those in several other states, should be established by statute to oversee and provide direction for all aspects of the State's records management program. The board should consist of the Governor, the Attorney General, the Comptroller, the State Archivist, the Speaker of the Assembly, the President *pro tem* of the Senate, and the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, or their designees. The board should coordinate all State government records management and archival programming efforts. During the initial phase of the board's operations, its members will need to consult on the best way to develop a State government-wide records effort that also preserves the legal prerogatives and responsibilities of each of the three branches of government for its own records. The board should be organized to carry out

the following duties:

A. Review and approve all State government records disposition requests.

B. Review records management problems of State government; monitor and report annually to the Governor, Legislature, and Judiciary on records management programs developed in the three branches of State government; and make recommendations for improved records management programming.

C. Ensure the coordination of the State Archives program with records management programs in all three branches of government.

D. Monitor compliance of State agencies and offices with statutes and regulations relating to archives and records management, and issue compliance orders in cases of violation.

3. The legal authority of the State Archives should be clarified and strengthened in several critical areas. The Archives' statutory authority should be changed in the following ways:

A. The Archives should have clear legal authority over and responsibility for all State government records having archival value. State government records should be broadly defined to include the records of all Executive agencies and officials, including public benefit corporations that serve the entire State or that carry out statewide functions; all legislative committees, commissions, and administrative offices; and all offices and courts under the State Unified Court System. The Archives should have two options for carrying out its responsibility for archival records: (1) accessioning such records into the Archives; or (2) establishing standards and conditions for retention and administration of such records by their agency of origin. Option (2) is the preferred one, for example, for archival records of State University campuses, of the Supreme Court and lower courts, and of selected public benefit corporations.

B. The Archives should have the authority to monitor the management of archival records series throughout government and to require the cooperation of the Office of General Services, records management offices in the Unified Court System and the Legislature, and records officers in individual agencies. This authority should include *at least* the following: (1) the Archives should establish and promulgate standards for the design of automated data-processing systems to ensure that potential future research needs are considered and that appropriate documentation is created and retained (see Recommendation No. 4-I, below); (2) the Archives should establish and promulgate standards for design of micrographics systems that will cover records identified as archival, to ensure that the film will meet archival standards for filming, processing, and storage (see Recommendation No. 4-H, below). (3) the Archives should be authorized to inspect existing archival records in government offices and to require officers to follow suitable methods for maintaining, storing, servicing, and protecting the records.

C. State offices should be required to transfer to the Archives the original microfilm copy of any microfilmed record determined by the Archives to have archival value (see Recommendation No. 4-E, below).

D. State Archives should be given explicit authority to requisition: (1) any State government records more than 75 years old; and (2) any record identified as archival where there is less than one reference per month. Exceptions can be made where the State office holding the records can demonstrate to the State Records Management Council an overriding administrative need to retain the original.

E. The question of access to sensitive records

held by the Archives should be resolved by a statute that: (1) provides that for records less than 75 years old, access shall be granted under guidelines established by the State Archivist after consultation with the Committee on Open Government and the State Records Management Council, in no case more restrictive than as specified by Freedom of Information and Privacy statutes for the branch of government transferring the records to the archives; and (2) for records more than 75 years old, provides that they be open without any restrictions. (See Recommendations No. 1-G, above, and No. 9 in Area B, below.)

4. The State Archives should be given additional resources in order to address urgent priorities and develop several critical program functions. The State Education Department, the Division of the Budget, and the Legislature should provide new resources for the State Archives to meet its minimal responsibilities to assemble, preserve, protect, and service the State government's archival records. At present, New York's per capita support for State archival records is only about ten percent of that in states with well-developed archival programs. Additional resources are needed for the Archives to administer the records it now holds, to handle a growing volume of records, to meet an increasing number of reference demands, and, as outlined above, to monitor activities related to archival records in all three branches of government. An agenda of the most pressing priorities for the Archives is outlined below. New personnel are needed to carry out some of the activities. The archives requires specialists in automation, machine-readable records, audiovisual records, and public programs; a professional conservator; and eight to twelve technicians and clerks for microfilming, conservation, and records processing. In other cases, new equipment or facilities are needed, e.g., a fumigation facility; expanded laboratory facilities for handling machine-readable records, videotapes and other audiovisual records; and an automated data-processing system.

Given these new resources, during the course of the next five years, the Archives should do the following:

A. Appraise and, where appropriate, accession the older records that are still in State agencies, the Legislature, and the Courts.

B. Achieve summary intellectual and physical control over the backlog of accessioned records, and keep pace with newly added records.

C. Develop finding aids, a newsletter, audiovisual presentations, and other public programs that demonstrate the array of holdings in the Archives, encourage broader research use, and increase public understanding of the role of archives in society.

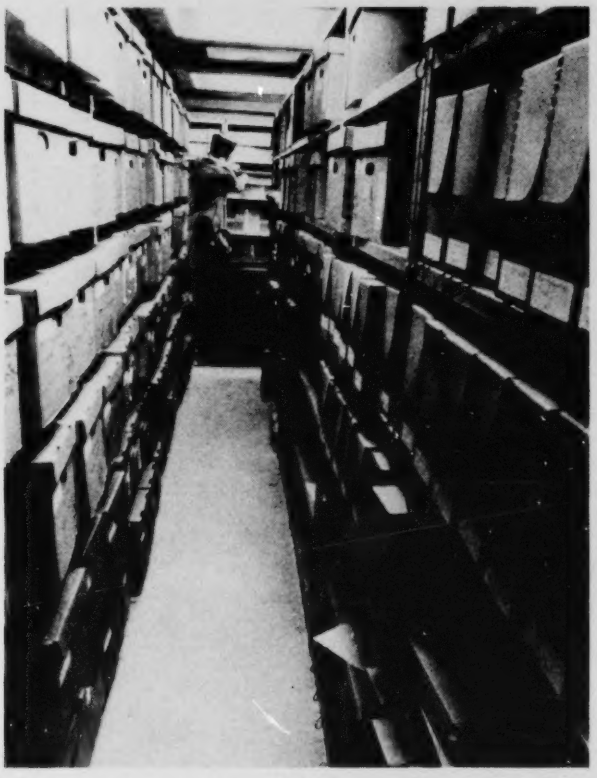
D. Develop an ongoing micrographics program for records with high research value.

E. Identify State government microfilm operations that cover archival records, and, whenever possible, accession the original microfilm copy and one use copy of the microfilm directly from these offices (see Recommendation No. 3-C, above).

F. Develop a conservation program that includes basic cleaning, refoldering and reboxing as needed for most records, and more intensive conservation work on items with obvious intrinsic value.

G. Attend to the growing body of audiovisual materials being created by State government by developing a program for appraising and handling such records.

H. Adopt, promulgate, and enforce standards for microfilming of archival records in the State gov-



The State Archives, which opened in 1978, houses nearly 35,000 cubic feet of State Government records of enduring value. These range from Dutch and British Colonial documents to 1982 legislative bill and veto jackets and records of the 1979 Assembly Task Force on Toxic Substances. Because of the newness of the State Archives, the huge volume of records that had not previously received archival treatment, and the continuing influx of archival records, many of the State's archives have not yet been arranged and described for convenient use.

ernment (see Recommendation No. 3-B, above).

I. Adopt, promulgate, and enforce standards for automated data-processing systems that collect or create information with long-term research value (see Recommendation No. 3-B, above).

J. Monitor development and use of new information technology and develop standards to ensure that information of archival value processed through this new technology is retained and preserved.

K. Adopt an automated system to streamline accessioning, description, reference, and other Archives activities by reducing redundant staff work and providing more effective access to records descriptions.

L. Either in conjunction with the Office of General Services or separately, open an office in New York City to deal with State agencies there and to serve the local research community.

5. The State Archives' facilities should be improved and expanded. The work and storage facilities for the State's archival records should be upgraded as follows:

A. The risk of destruction from fire at the Archives should be reduced through: (1) constructing fire walls; (2) installing a fire suppresion system; (3) continuously testing the existing smoke detection system to ensure its reliability; (4) developing a plan for fighting fires; and (5) developing procedures for salvaging fire-damaged and water-damaged records should a fire occur.

B. A fumigation chamber should be installed to service all records entering the Archives.

C. Improved temperature and humidity controls and an air filtering system should be installed to maintain environmental conditions in the Archives' stack area within ranges that will prolong the longevity of the records.

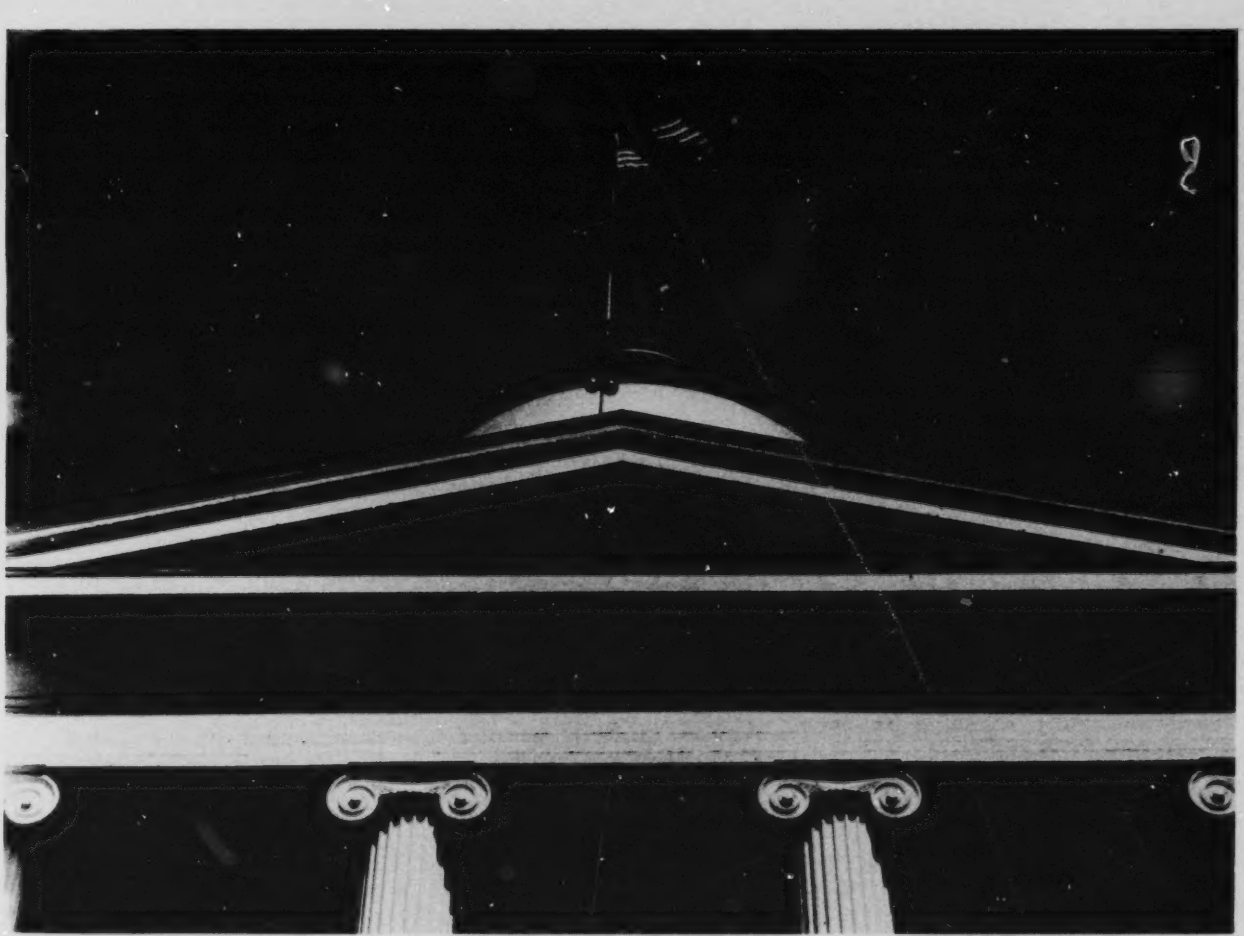
D. Laboratory and storage facilities and equipment should be provided for the Archives to service and maintain photographic records, sound and video materials, machine-readable records, and records in other specialized media.

E. The Archives, the Education Department, and the Office of General Services should jointly develop plans for additional space in or near the Cultural Education Center for storage of archival records under acceptable environmental and security conditions.

B. LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS

Findings

1. Most local government officials do not recognize the potential importance of their records as informational and cultural resources and have not developed programs for their sound management. Most local officials desire to manage their records in the most efficient and economical manner possible. Most of them, however, begin their official duties without the benefit of any training in records management or archival techniques. The everyday pressures of office leave little time to devote to records problems, and limitations on space, staff, and other resources discourage sound records management practices. Moreover, there is insufficient recognition among government officials of the role of records as information carriers central to the functioning of government and the people of New York. Improved records administration in local government is essential for cost-efficient operation, for the protection of the rights of citizens, and for the identification and preservation of important historical records.



The Wayne County Courthouse, which was built in 1854, Lyons, New York. County courthouses are among New York's most impressive historic buildings. The records in them also contain some of the most important information about the history of the govern-

ernment, and of the value of some of the records for long-term historical and other research. Few governments have developed a comprehensive program of records management — the process of systematic creation, organization, maintenance, use, and periodic legal disposition of records. As a result, public resources are being wasted by the creation of unnecessary records, by unwarranted duplication, by inefficient filing and management practices, and by retention and storage of records that are no longer needed for government business or any research purposes. In addition, poor records management leads to destruction of valuable records needed for efficient government and for important historical research and analysis of government programs. Public business is hindered because needed records are not readily available to either the government or its citizens.

2. There is insufficient public interest in and understanding of local government records issues. One potential force for improving local government records administration is public interest to draw attention to records conditions, to advocate new programs to improve them, and to obtain more resources for these programs. Especially important are associations of local government officials (e.g., the Association of Towns of the State of New York, the New York State Association of Counties, the Conference of Mayors and Other Municipal Officials, and the New York State School Boards Association). These groups give intense attention to other local government issues but have shown little active interest in records questions beyond scheduling sessions on records management techniques at their workshops and meetings. This lack of attention mirrors the disinterest in records issues shown by national organizations such as the National Association of Counties and the National League of Cities. Moreover, State agencies such as the Department of State, Audit and Control, and Social Services, which regulate or assist local governments in many program areas, have shown only limited interest in issues relating to the records generated by these program activities. Genealogists, educators, journalists, historical researchers, and others who use local government records in increasing numbers, also have not organized effectively to act as critics and as advocates for the improved management of local records. These outside groups and agencies could be a major force in educating the general public about the cost-effectiveness of good records management as well as the cultural and research value of records. Furthermore, the general public, although concerned about economical government administration and accountability, seems unaware of the importance of government records and the advantages of their sound management.

3. State court records in local government custody are a pressing problem in need of immediate attention. Court records, particularly those in the custody of county clerks (who also serve as clerks of the court), constitute a serious storage and management problem, for several reasons: (a) their overwhelming volume makes for high storage expense; (b) their volume continues to grow at a rapid rate because of the continuing increase in litigation and the absence of records management guidelines; (c) their legal nature and the information they contain often present complex confidentiality and access issues; (d) their status is unclear in that they appear to be regarded as State rather than local government records under the Unified Court Act, even though no State resources have been made available for their storage or management; (e) the retention and disposition guidelines issued by the Office of Court Administration are inadequate, unclear, and do not take archival considerations into acount; and (f) adequate archival appraisal criteria and sampling procedures have not been developed for these records.

4. State Archives lacks sufficient staff and other resources to carry out its local government records responsibilities. At the time the present report was prepared, the Archives' Local Records Section consisted of three professional staff to provide the records retention and disposition schedules and the advisory services in records management and archival administration that are needed by New York's thousands of local governments. Three additional positions in the section, including that of the section head, had been vacant for over a year. Moreover, under current State Civil Service procedures, personnel in that section, who have the official title of Public Records Analyst, must be selected from the civil ser-

vice list used for entry into all nonspecialized professional State government positions. This has meant that such personnel seldom have appropriate background or training in records management or archives. This lack of sufficient, qualified staff and other resources contributes to the shortcomings in the Archives' local records program described in Findings 5, 6, and 7 immediately below.

5. The State Archives' records retention and disposition procedures are inadequate. Since 1911, all local governments except New York City have had to seek the consent of the Commissioner of Education before disposing of their records. Supervision over records retention and disposition has been carried out by a series of offices within the State Education Department, and is currently handled by the State Archives. The Archives issues numerous records retention and disposition schedules for each type of local government in the State. These detailed schedules — some have several hundred items — are not fully meeting the program's objectives of encouraging the disposition of obsolete records and ensuring the retention of those with continuing value. It is apparent that the scheduling system has several serious deficiencies: (a) In preparing schedules and establishing legal minimum retention periods, the Archives does not systematically ascertain and take into account the views of local government officials. (b) Preparation of each schedule requires such a great amount of State Archives' staff time that schedules are issued and updated too infrequently. (c) Many local officials, particularly those who have recently taken office, are unaware of the existence of either the schedules or of the laws that underlie them. (d) Local officials believe the schedules are too detailed and cumbersome, and they find it difficult to match up descriptions on the schedules with the records in their offices. (e) The schedules usually do not form the basis for continuing disposition of records once the minimum legal retention periods have been met. They are ordinarily consulted only when local officials wish to dispose of records that have become a storage problem.

6. The State Archives' records management advisory services are not meeting the records management needs of New York's local government. State Education Department oversight of local government records has given increasing emphasis to records management questions during the past several decades. The current program, however, is not meeting records management needs. Several drawbacks are apparent: (a) The program's publications and field presentations have emphasized filing systems, indexing, and inactive records storage methods. The program has failed to develop adequate guidance on newer approaches to information management, particularly microfilming systems and automated data-processing systems. (b) Most of the program's field work has been carried out on a reactive basis, responding to requests from specific local governments or individual officers within those governments, and visiting them to offer advice on particular problems. This well-intentioned attempt to be helpful has diverted the Archives from providing training and advice in a more efficient, collective way (e.g., through workshops, audiovisual presentations, and an integrated system of publications). It also has promoted a focus on specific, isolated problems rather than on a more comprehensive approach to records management, and it has depleted Archives' staff resources. (c) The program has attempted to enforce rigid fire protection requirements rather than taking a more flexible approach stressing the need for a vital records program and the preservation and protection of archival records.

7. Insufficient attention is being given to archival records by both local governments and by the State Archives. Archival records are those that have permanent or long-range value because of their importance as sources for research (by the government or by others), because the records are vital to the future operation of the government, or because they protect the rights and privileges of its citizens. Most local government officials sense that some of their records may be important for future research, but few have developed a systematic approach to selection and preservation of archival records. Officially appointed local government historians have a vague legal responsibility to inspect local government records and to collect historical sources, but their exact responsibilities have never been clearly defined. Con-

sequently, their work sometimes brings them into conflict with clerks and other local officials who have official responsibility for the custody of records.

The State Education Department's local records program has given insufficient attention to archival records, even though the original justification for establishing the State program in 1911 was to ensure the protection of local government records for historical research. As noted above, the program's focus moved steadily away from that initial goal toward broader records management problems. But the program has done little to promote a general awareness among the public, or among local government officials, of the value and importance of archival records. It has not developed guidelines for identifying such records, nor promulgated a list of such records, nor issued publications on preserving, managing, and making them available for research. Until recently, archival considerations have played a small role in the establishment of legal minimum retention periods and schedules. Even in recent years, schedules have designated certain records series as having "archival value," but have not explained that term nor advised local officials on how to deal with such records.

The only significant exception to this pattern was the Local Government Archives Program, operated jointly during 1979–1983 by the State Archives and the State Historical Records Advisory Board with a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. The program was administered as a special project by the State Archives rather than by the Archives' Local Records Section. It led to the establishment of model archival programs, introduced several hundred local officials to records management and archival techniques, and will conclude with publication of a manual on records administration. The program's chief contribution, however, was to reveal the limited effect that State Archives records management services have had, the difficulties that local officials experience in trying to use its records schedules and, perhaps most important, the need for a clear State Archives policy toward archival records in local government offices.

8. Statutes governing access to sensitive local government records are inconsistent. Researchers seeking access to sensitive local government records such as vital records, social services case files, and police and court records, face an array of legal restrictions that are often difficult to interpret and that are not consistently applied by local government officials. Access to vital statistics is governed by restrictive provisions of the State's Public Health Law amplified by regulations of the Commissioner of Health. These regulations, in turn, are subject to interpretation by local Registrars of Vital Statistics. The State Health Department maintains duplicate copies of these records at its central office in Albany, but researchers find it difficult to use these records because of access restrictions, high search and copying fees, and very limited availability of indexes to the records. This system frustrates researchers and has attracted considerable criticism from genealogists, local government historians, and other researchers who need the information in these records. Other special statutes govern access to social services, police, judicial, and other sensitive records.

The State also has a comprehensive Freedom of Information Law that applies to all records not specifically regulated by other statutes. This Law, which provides that records are to be considered accessible unless they fall into certain specified categories of deniability, has generally operated to open records to researchers. However, the Law does not have any special provisions for historical research, and the Committee on Open Government which administers the Law does not include any representatives from archival or research groups.

Recommendations

1. Responsibility for the sound management of local government records should be clearly defined. Associations of local government officials, the State Archives and other State agencies that deal with local governments, and other groups and individuals interested in local government records, should work together to clarify the responsibilities of local government officials and State government agencies for the sound management of local government records. The following steps should be taken:

A. The Public Officers Law should be amended to clearly define local government officials' responsibility for economical and efficient creation and management of their records.

B. Where existing statutes do not already adequately spell out responsibility for custody of records, the laws should be amended to require the chief executive officer of each unit of government to appoint a records officer to be responsible for records management and archival programming in compliance with State statutes and regulations.

C. The various laws pertaining to the responsibilities of the Commissioner of Education and the State Archives should be amended to give the State Archives authority to carry out the advisory services outlined in the Recommendations below.

2. The State Archives should be given additional resources in order to develop a regional technical assistance system and to improve overall advisory services to local governments. Existing vacancies on the Archives' Local Records staff must be filled if the program is to function in even a minimally acceptable way. The State Education Department, the Division of the Budget, and the Legislature must allocate additional resources for the Archives to provide better services to local governments, as outlined in the Recommendations below. The Archives should develop a regional approach for working with local governments, preferably by assigning field staff to an existing regional service system such as the Reference and Research Library Resources Systems ("3R's"), which have already proven effective in coordinating services and promoting networking arrangements among the libraries of the State. Other service centers that warrant such consideration include the State University of New York system and the regional historical services agencies. The expansion of these systems to include services to local governments should be carried out in conjunction with the development of services to other parts of the State's historical records repository community, as discussed in Areas C and D of this report, and in consultation with the Department of State and other State agencies that provide assistance to local governments.

A regional approach would permit delivery of services by personnel who, while carrying out State Archives policies, would be more aware of and responsive to local needs than personnel based in Albany. The field archivists should concentrate on assisting records officers in local governments that are carrying out the following activities: (a) establishing archival programs; (b) planning or initiating comprehensive records management programs; (c) developing programs that can serve as models for others to follow; (d) addressing significant records management or archival issues in an experimental way; (e) developing cooperative programs; or (f) developing automated data-processing techniques or microfilming as part of comprehensive records management systems.

As this regional system is developing, the Ar-

chives should also develop complementary services from its office in Albany, including: (a) publications geared to records management and archival needs; (b) audiovisual presentations that can be loaned to local officials; and (c) workshops on records management and archival techniques, possibly offered on a regional basis in collaboration with field-based personnel.

3. State records advisory services should emphasize archival records. The top priority of State Archives' Albany-based and regional advisory services should be to provide advice and assistance on the identification, management, and use of archival records. Toward this end, the Archives should consult with local government records custodians, representatives from historical and other research groups, academic historians, and other users of archival records to develop a program that includes: (a) workshops, publications, and audiovisual and other presentations that explain to the general public and to local officials the need for archival programming, that introduce archival techniques, and that make suggestions for broader research use of archival records; (b) guidance and assistance in establishing and operating local governmental archival programs; (c) lists of records, for each type of government, that have archival value and that require retention either of the original or of microfilm copies (see Recommendation No. 5-F, below); (d) a regulation forbidding the destruction of any record more than 75 years old without the explicit approval of the State Archives; (e) guidelines and minimum storage, care, and access conditions for the transfer of local government archival records to libraries, historical agencies, and other nongovernment repositories; (f) in cooperation with the Division of Historical and Anthropological Services in the

POOR MANAGEMENT of local government records contributes to inefficient government and increases the cost of identifying and retrieving information needed by the government and its citizens and . . .

. . . also leads to the deterioration and eventual loss of valuable archival records.

HANDBOOK FOR USING THE

ALBANY COUNTY
HALL OF RECORDS
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY CLERK

SYSTEMATIC RECORDS MANAGEMENT procedures improve the performance of government, increase its accessibility and accountability, and simplify the identification and preservation of archival records of enduring value to the community.

State Museum, clarification of the records functions of officially appointed local government historians, to include their acting as advocates for archival programs and for research use of records, but to exclude collection of records; and (g) plans for creating and maintaining a data base of information on archival records in local governments.

4. State records management advice should focus on program planning and management rather than on individual records problems. Archives advisory services — through publications, presentations, workshops, and field-based personnel — should place special emphasis on the development of comprehensive records management programs integrated with archival programs. The Archives should especially stress: (a) Program justification — the Archives should emphasize the advantages of sound records management programs in promoting efficient and effective governmental administration and the benefits of well-run archival programs in making important records available for research use by government itself and by historical and other researchers. (b) Advocacy — the Archives should develop materials and presentations to enable local government officials and the interested public to effectively present to decision makers in local government the case for sound records management and archival programs. (c) Planning — the Archives should stress the need for thorough planning prior to initiation of any records program, and should explain the planning process. (d) Comprehensive program development — an essential message is for local governments to develop comprehensive records programs rather than piecemeal solutions to discrete records problems. (e) Adoption of technological advances — the Archives should take the lead in encouraging local governments to utilize technological advances in information storage and retrieval,

particularly micrographics and automated data-processing systems.

5. State oversight of records retention and disposition should be changed to give more authority and responsibility to local officials and to simplify disposition procedures. An essential companion piece to Recommendations Nos. 3 and 4, above, is a new approach to records retention and disposition. The existing system of records schedules should gradually be phased out in favor of a more workable approach that gives more authority and responsibility to local governments. A revised system should include the following elements:

A. State Archives advisory services should explain the rationale behind determining minimum retention periods for local government records, describe the factors that should be taken into account in determining such retention periods, and carefully relate records retention and disposition to other aspects of records management.

B. State Archives should develop general schedules covering records common to many local governments in the State. These and other schedules should be developed in close consultation with local government officials, should be clear and easy to use, and should be published in easily updatable, loose-leaf format.

C. For certain specialized areas, e.g., health offices, social services departments, and highway offices, the Archives should publish schedules with broad, generic record descriptions that local government officials can readily apply to their records.

D. State agencies should be required to assist the State Archives' records scheduling function by furnishing the Archives with copies of rules, regulations, directives, and other materials that affect the creation, retention, or disposition of local government records.

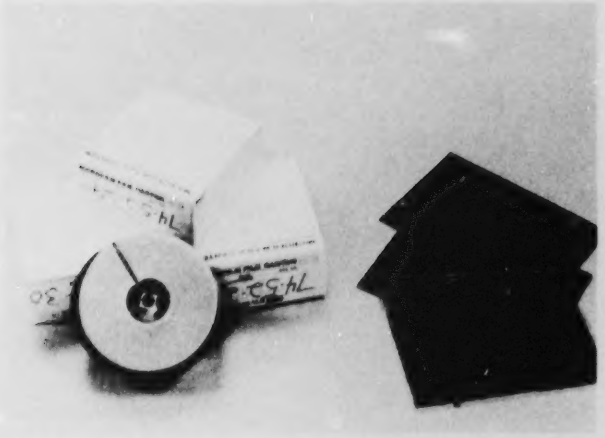
E. For records not covered by either the general or specialized schedules, local government records officers should be given authority to propose minimum retention periods, and to secure review and approval from a local government records advisory committee consisting of the chief administrative officer, the chief fiscal officer, the counsel, the Clerk, and the Historian, or their designees. Records officers would then submit records descriptions and proposed retention periods to the State Archives for review and approval. To further facilitate this process, the Archives would maintain a file of approved schedules that could be made available upon request to any local government official.

F. The Archives should publish, for each type of government, a list of records that have been determined to have archival value, and should forbid destruction of these records (see Recommendation No. 3-c, above).

6. Programs should be developed to promote the microfilming of local government archival records. Microfilming will ensure the preservation of the information in such records and make it possible to disseminate this information through loan or reproduction of the film. To encourage more microfilming, the Archives should:

A. Through its field services, publications, and other advisory services, actively promote the advantages of microfilming archival records.

B. Develop a regulation that archival records filmed with public funds must follow the generally accepted standards of the National Micrographics Association (now called the Association for Information and Image Management) and the American National



Microfilm is frequently an effective means of preserving information in historical records and also making it more widely available for use through the production of multiple copies for loan or sale. Some local government records may be legally destroyed and microfilm substituted for the original records if the microcopy is produced and stored according to appropriate standards.

Standards Institute, and issue materials explaining these standards and guidelines for their achievement.

C. Require deposit in the State Archives of one copy of all local government archival records microfilm, provide secure storage for this film, and make copies of the film available to researchers in the State Archives' research room and via interlibrary loan.

7. Special, immediate attention should be given to developing management and archival programs for court records. The Court of Appeals, in cooperation with the Office of Court Administration and the State Archives, should appoint a special Judicial Records Study Committee to examine the administration of the records of the State's court system (see Recommendation No. 1-F in Area A, above). In making its study and report, the Committee should give special attention to the issue of the financial burden on local governments in storing and caring for court records. Resources should be provided for the Court to hire a records management-archives specialist to coordinate records activities. Schedules of records disposition should be developed as soon as possible for all court records generally administered by local governments. The schedules should identify archival records and provide that such records may not be disposed of without consent of the State Archives.

8. The Commissioner of Education should create an ongoing advisory committee to counsel the Department and the State Archives on their local records services. The interest and cooperation of local officials can be increased and the schedules and advisory services developed by State Archives can be improved through ongoing dialogue with an advisory group appointed by the Commissioner or the State Archivist. This advisory body should consist primarily of local officials from the various types of local governments but might also include archivists, records managers and experts in technical areas important to local records work. The members of the advisory body should provide advice and seek to provide liaison to the local records community, including the associations of local government officials.

9. Researchers' right of access to sensitive local government records should be clarified. The issue of access should be addressed in three ways: (a) The Public Health Law and other statutes governing access should be amended to eliminate all access restrictions on local government records more than 75 years old. (b) The State Archives, after consultation with local government officials and researcher groups, should develop guidelines for management of and access to sensitive records less than 75 years old. (c) The Freedom of Information Act should be amended to add the State Archivist as a member of the Committee on Open Government. (See Recommendation Nos. 1-G and 3-E in Area A, above.)

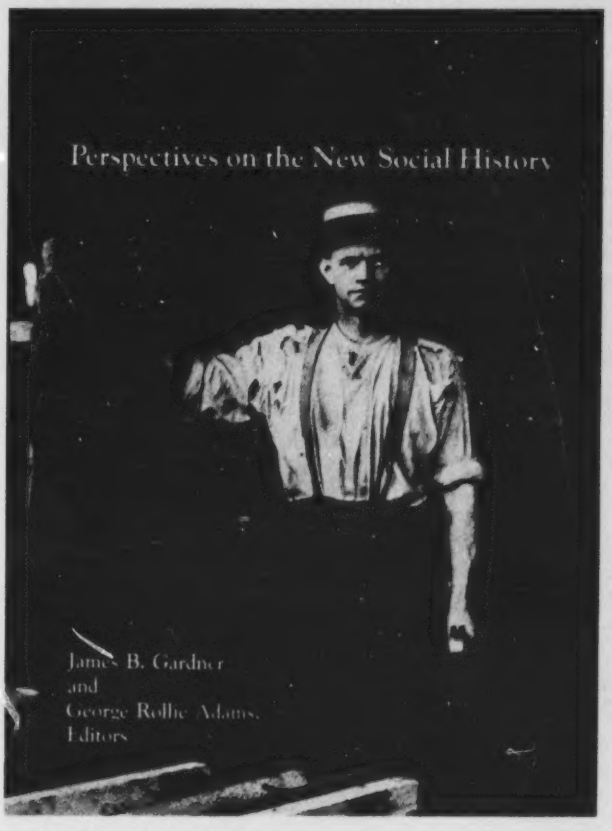
C. NONGOVERNMENT HISTORICAL RECORDS*

Findings

1. The collection of historical records in New York is unsystematic, uncoordinated, and incomplete. New York has a number of soundly administered historical records programs, some of national significance. During the past few years, there has been notable progress in a number of areas. For instance, grants from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission have supported initiation of some new and promising historical records programs (such as those of Agudath Israel, the New York Botanical Garden, the New York Zoological Society, and the United Negro College Fund) and have strengthened existing programs (e.g., those of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research and the Albany Institute of History and Art). NHPRC funding also has supported initiation of the statewide historical records survey by Cornell University. This survey locates and describes the holdings of historical records repositories throughout the State, data that have great potential for future historical records program planning. There also have been a few encouraging examples of cooperation among historical records programs. Regional library and historical service agencies — Reference and Research Library Resources Systems, the Regional Conference of Historical Agencies, and the Federation of Historical Services — have revealed the benefits of cooperation and of advisory services provided on a regional basis.

Despite these hopeful advances, however, the overall pattern of historical records programming is still bleak. Most repositories in the State have not developed careful policies that clearly indicate the types of records they collect. Without settled collections strategies, they build up their holdings haphazardly and unsystematically. Moreover, few historical records repositories communicate or cooperate with each other on an ongoing basis, and repositories have generally not worked together to develop local, regional, or statewide documentation strategies. Historical records programs sometimes compete with or wastefully duplicate each other's efforts. There is great variation in the quality and adequacy of programs among repositories in the State. No ongoing means exist for collecting and analyzing data on a statewide basis regarding collecting patterns and trends.

Cover of a recent publication of the American Association for State and Local History. The meteoric rise in popular interest in tracing one's "roots" and the development of the "new social history" in academic circles, have increased the importance of records documenting the lives of ordinary people. The massive volume of such records warrants careful evaluation and selection criteria and coordination among repositories collecting them.



* The Findings and Recommendations in this Part pertain only to historical records other than those created by governments. However, for purposes of brevity, these nongovernment historical records are referred to simply as "historical records" in this Part.

Some important topical areas appear to be receiving relatively little attention. For instance, only a small number of repositories hold records relating to women, Blacks, and other minorities, and still fewer acquire records relating to science and technology and to environmental and ecological concerns—areas of vital concern to New York's future. Repositories usually continue to collect in the same topical areas as they have in the past, and few have developed a mechanism for responding to new research interests or emerging public concerns. Furthermore, as discussed more fully in Area D of this report, the statewide Historical Documents Inventory being conducted from Cornell may well terminate because State funds have not been provided to support its completion. Large areas of the State—the Hudson Valley, Long Island and New York City— are left unsurveyed.

Another dimension of the overall documentation problem is the underdeveloped state of programs for institutional archival records. Most of the State's major religious, business, labor, cultural, educational, social action, community, and other private institutions have not developed their own archival programs or made other provisions for their archival records. In most such institutions, no special attention is given to archival records; they are destroyed or at least remain unavailable for use by either institutional staff or outside researchers. In other cases, institutions have indiscriminately transferred materials to historical records repositories without careful consultation and without assurance that the records will be effectively adminstered by the repositories that receive them. In many such cases neither the creating institution nor the receiving repository assumes ongoing responsibility for systematic identification and transfer of other archival records of the institution.

2. Most historical records programs are underdeveloped and need to be strengthened to carry out essential archival functions. Despite some strong individual programs, and increased awareness of program deficiencies, most historical records repositories lack the facilities, resources, and staff expertise to carry out core archival functions in a minimally satisfactory way. This project's investigation of historical records repositories, consultation with the historical records community, and the Cornell historical records survey, all reveal that most historical records programs are deficient in the following areas:

A. Resources are inadequate to support essential archival activities, even for small and moderate-sized historical records programs. Program managers indicate that inadequate funding and insufficient staff are the major problems for their programs. The Board's survey showed that, for over half of the respondents, budget and staff have remained the same or decreased in recent years.

B. Many staff members working in historical records repositories are not familiar with archival techniques and procedures. Nearly half of the responses to the Board's questionnaire indicated that staff members have no specialized training in historical records procedures.

C. Records are not adequately described and finding aids have not been developed. Most repositories have not developed published guides or inventories describing their holdings. The Board's survey revealed that many programs rely on card catalogs, which are often ill-suited to the description of historical records. In many repositories, the level of description is uneven, some records being described in great detail while others of equal or greater importance not being described at all.

D. Records are inadequately accessioned and poorly arranged. It is not uncommon for researchers to encounter records for which there is no documentation of origin, ownership, or authorization for use. Records are often maintained in no usable or even discernable arrangement, thereby discouraging and frustrating research use.

E. Storage conditions are inadequate, thereby accelerating deterioration of records. The Board's survey revealed that a majority of New York's historical records in repositories are not stored in acid-free folders or boxes, that fewer than one-third of all repositories have temperature or humidity controls, and that fewer than half have security or fire detection systems.

F. Preservation needs are largely unmet. Most historical records program personnel do not have a basic understanding of preservation techniques. Nearly half of the repositories responding to the

Board's questionnaire reported that they carry out no conservation activities. Fewer than half carry out basic cleaning and mending, and less than twenty percent encapsulate records or send out records for professional conservation work. Only about twenty percent microfilm any of their records.

G. Researchers are often unaware of the existence of records that contain information on their research topics, or they cannot use the records because of lack of finding aids or because the records have not been processed. Therefore, records are not fully utilized by researchers.

Recommendations

1. Coordinated documentation strategies should be developed to ensure that adequate records are preserved and soundly administered in all important subjects and all geographic regions. The State Historical Records Advisory Board, adminstrators of historical records programs, organizations of archivists, historians, and other reseachers, and other individuals and groups interested in historical records issues should work together to develop a coordinated approach for preserving New York's documentary heritage. The general goal of this approach would be for all historical records programs to work together toward generally agreed-upon documentation goals. More specific recommendations include the following:

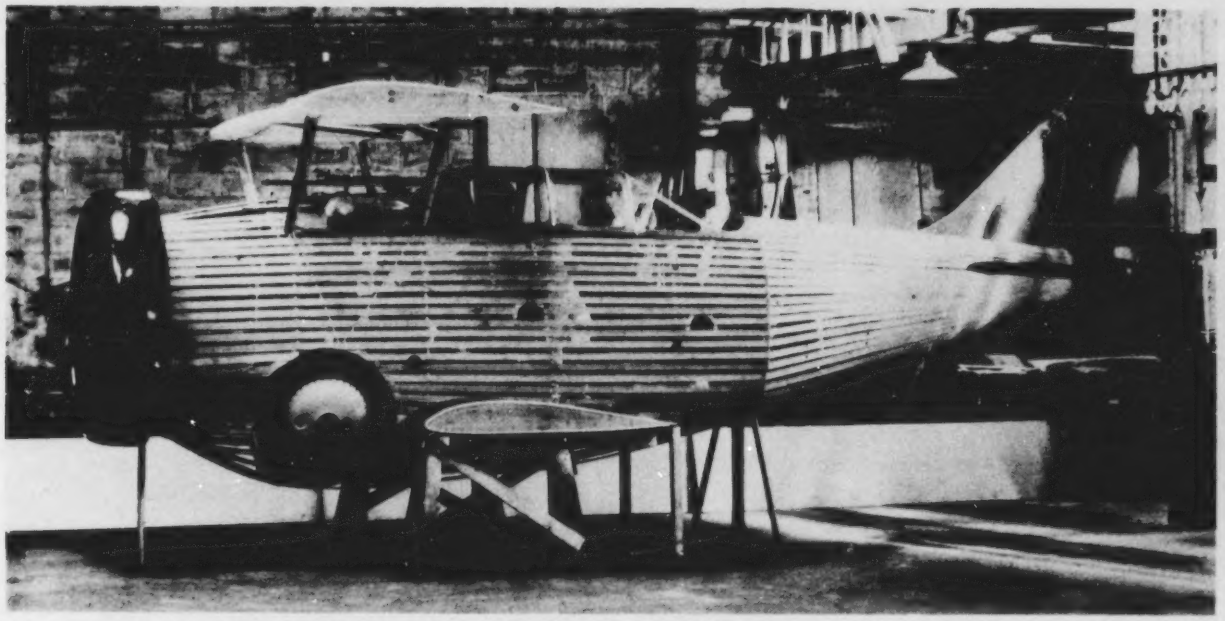
A. The State Historical Records Advisory Board should initiate this process by creating a working group to develop a statement on "Repositories and Documentation" and suggested procedures to begin implementing such a statement. This group should include representatives from professional archival, historical, library, and other organizations; from library and historical regional systems; and from State agencies that provide advice or grant aid to historical records programs. This working group must seek the views of the broad community involved in historical documentation in New York. All of these groups should be asked to participate in the process of developing and implementing documentation strategies for New York.

B. As early as possible during the development of the statewide strategy envisioned in A above, collecting agencies in each geographical region should begin discussions to seek agreement on a documentation strategy for their region. This process should start in the communities, proceed to the county level, and finally join in the regions. The goal at each level should be the development of formal collection strategies for the respective regions. Similar discussions should be held among major repositories collecting on similar subjects, such as labor, the arts, science and technology, ethnic studies, and other specialities.

C. Accurate and complete information on historical records repositories and their holdings is essential for realistic planning and development of documentation strategies. Therefore, as recommended in Area D of this report, the historical resources survey being conducted by Cornell University must be completed for the rest of the State. A directory of repositories, including their collecting policies, should be produced by the survey project or in some other fashion.

D. Each historical records repository should undertake a self-analysis of its program along the lines suggested by the Society of American Archivists' *Evaluation of Archival Institutions: Services, Principles, and Guide to Self Study* (Chicago, 1982). The goals of this process are to: (1) analyze program performance; (2) determine the extent of resources and their adequacy to sustain necessary core functions; and (3) identify functions that might be shifted to other repositories better able to carry them out, or that might be carried out on a cooperative basis with other repositories.

E. As a result of the consultation and the self-study described in B and D, above, each historical records repository should develop a written collections policy, in consultation with other historical records programs servicing the same geographical region or having similar collecting interests. The policy should clearly state: (1) the subject area(s) in which



1931 photo of mock-up of the XFF-1, Grumman Corportation's first aircraft. A number of corporate archives have been established in New York in recent years but most corporate historical records programs are part of special projects to celebrate anniversaries or other special events. Too few corporations and major educational, cultural and social institutions have created a formal archives linked to an ongoing corporate records management program.

the particular repository specializes; (2) the geographical scope of its collecting activities; (3) the inclusive dates of the records it seeks; (4) the research interests or groups that it seeks to serve; and (5) the relationship of its collecting efforts to the efforts of other historical records programs in the same geographical region or subject area.

F. Private organizations such as businesses, labor unions, churches, educational and cultural institutions, political, professional, and social organizations, and other major nongovernmental entities should acknowledge and assume the responsibility for care and maintenance of their own archival records. This responsibility can be met in one of two ways: (1) through establishment of an institutional archives to identify, acquire, and administer the institutions' archival records; or (2) through deposit of archival records in an established historical records repository. If option (2) is chosen, records should be transferred according to written agreement specifying the conditions of the transfer and the responsibilities of both the transferring institution and the recipient repository. Under option (2) the organization that created the records should contribute resources to assist in the continuing administration of its archives; the repository, should actively seek such support prior to accepting the records of an active organization.

G. The State Historical Records Advisory Board in cooperation with the repositories in New York State, should actively assist the development of coordinated documentation strategies in conjunction with its other activities (see Recommendations in Area D of this report). Board activities might include: (1) producing publications on how to develop and implement such strategies; (2) obtaining State and Federal funds to underwrite pilot projects to develop coordinated documentation strategies; (3) requiring for receipt of funds under any State grant-in-aid program (see Recommendation No. 10-B in Area D, below) that each applicant must have developed a collections statement in cooperation with other repositories in its subject or geographical area; (4) reporting on the development of cooperative documentation strategies; and (5) studying or sponsoring studies on the ade-

quacy of documentation programs throughout the State.

H. The State Education Department should request those applicants for historical agency or library charters which intend to collect historical records to indicate the potential relationship of their programs to statewide, regional, and local collection and documentation strategies as these are developed.

2. Advisory services should be provided to historical records programs on a regional basis. New resources should be provided for the State Archives to develop advisory services to historical records programs on a regional basis. This should preferably be done by assigning field staff to an existing regional service system such as the Reference and Research Library Resources Systems ("3R's"), which already coordinates services and encourages networking among libraries throughout the State. The State Education Department, Division of the Budget, and State Legislature must allocate new resources for the State Archives to provide these services through the "3R's" or other regional systems. These field advisory services should place emphasis on:

A. Encouraging and aiding development and maintenance of the coordinated documentation arrangements envisioned in Recommendation No. 1, above.

B. Advising on historical records program planning, evaluation, and management.

C. Providing advice and training for historical records repository personnel in appraisal, arrangement, description, reference, public programs, and other aspects of historical records administration.

D. Advising on technical questions pertaining to microfilming, conservation, storage conditions, and other technical matters.

E. Encouraging regional cooperation and the development of networking arrangements.

Development and implementation of the plan for these regional advisory services will require coordination with other State historical records program services:

A. The field advisory services should be developed and carried out in conjunction with other services to be provided by the State Archives to local governments (see Recommendation No. 2 in Area B of this report). A period of experimentation or testing through pilot projects may be required to determine the best means of delivering these services.

B. The State Education Department's Office of Cultural Education must develop a mechanism for ensuring close and continuous collaboration among the State Archives, the State Library, and the State Museum's Division of Historical and Anthropological Services on activities affecting historical records and historical records repositories. Under the regional advisory system envisioned above, State Archives field staff will provide advice and assistance to all types of historical records programs, including those in libraries and historical agencies. These services must be coordinated with the oversight and services delivered to libraries and to historical agencies by the State Library and the State Museum, respectively.

C. The close working relationship between the State Archives and the State Historical Records Advisory Board must be maintained, and State Archives services must be carried out in conjunction with statewide strategies developed by the Board, as recommended in Area D of this report. The Advisory Board should advise the Archives and evaluate its performance in providing these services.

D. COMMON PROBLEMS/COORDINATED SOLUTIONS

Findings

1. Public interest in historical records is increasing, but the public does not yet have sufficient understanding of the importance of historical records programs. The public has little awareness of the archival function in society and of the importance of historical records in contributing to significant research activities. To a majority of the public, the term "archives" still connotes dusty old records, of interest primarily to antiquarians or specialists in narrow fields of historical research. There is insufficient appreciation of historical records as the central documentation of past, present, and future human activity and as a key ingredient in the passage of our civilization from one generation to the next. This lack of awareness is partially due to the fact that historical records custodians have not made a major effort to educate the public about the nature and significance of archival work. Limited public understanding is, in turn, a major factor in the lack of financial support and other resources that has led to the underdeveloped state of most historical records programs in New York.

2. There is no established and accepted archival leadership in New York State. No statewide group or organization has taken the lead in developing solutions for historical records programs, serving as an advocate for historical records programs, focusing public attention on historical records issues, or monitoring government activities that affect historical records work. Professional archival organizations offer a forum for historical records program personnel to discuss archival techniques, but they do not provide a base for cooperative action or for addressing statewide issues and needs. Regional library systems and historical service agencies serve their member institutions in many ways, but they do not provide the leadership, coordination, or services required to meet most historical records problems.

The State Archives has provided occasional assistance to historical records programs, and the State Historical Records Advisory Board has served a useful but limited role in encouraging statewide historical records efforts and in promoting the improvement of historical records programming, largely through grants from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. However, neither of the State agencies exercises continuing statewide leadership. This makes it impossible for the archival community in New York State to establish long-term goals and priorities, to take concerted action on important issues, and to turn the attention of the news media, the Legislature, major funding sources, and the general public to archival problems.

3. Despite notable exceptions, historical records programs overall in New York operate independently and in isolation from each other. Virtually all historical records programs are part of larger institutions—State government, local governments, libraries, historical agencies, or, in the case of institutional archives—churches, businesses, colleges and universities, and other organizations. Records programs, therefore, usually have developed primarily to serve only the immediate purposes of their parent institutions. Because of this narrowly conceived purpose and focus, and because of the absence of statewide leadership and coordination, historical records programs have developed with little concern for how their efforts relate and contribute to the broad purpose of preserving New York's total documentary heritage. No systematic means have been developed for managers of historical records programs to meet and discuss common problems or to explore common solutions. Only a few cooperative programs have been developed, and these only on an *ad hoc* basis; formal networking arrangements have not received serious consideration. There also has been little discussion about how New York's relatively new State archival program and local government archival activities should relate to the thousands of nongovernmental historical records programs in the State. This continuing process of separate and independent development of historical records programs has been detrimental in several ways:

A. As noted in Section C of this report, historical records programs sometimes compete with or duplicate each other's efforts, while, at the same time, important topics are underdocumented because relatively few repositories happen to collect on those subjects.

B. There has been a failure to recognize common historical records programming needs and to develop common approaches or solutions.

C. There has been little recognition of the advantages to be gained by pooling and sharing resources to promote program development and accomplish goals that individual programs cannot achieve by themselves.

D. Because of the plethora of programs, researchers may overlook documentation important for their work, or may find it difficult and confusing to pursue source material on a given topic or geographical area.

4. There are few systematic, accessible programs for training to meet historical records program needs. One problem that retards the work of nearly all historical records programs in New York is the underdeveloped state of the archival profession in the nation, and the lack of training opportunities in historical records techniques. With the exception of personnel in a small number of large repositories, few of the thousands of local government records clerks, historical agency personnel, museum curators, librarians, and others who have charge of historical records in New York State, have any formal archival training. This lack of formal training reflects the following:

A. The national archival profession has not developed even minimal standards for archival training, the certification of archivists, or historical records programs. The nation's premier archival organization, the Society of American Archivists, has developed guidelines but not firm standards in these areas.

B. Several formal courses in archival techniques are offered in New York State, but only one university offers a master's degree with a concentration in archives, and that is combined with historical editing.

C. Regional library and historical agencies offer workshops in archival techniques, but these are held very infrequently and their scope is limited.

The results of limited archival training opportunities are obvious on two levels. First, people working directly with records must learn on the job and may never attain a proficiency in basic archival techniques. Second, program managers frequently do not develop the insight and perspective to successfully plan and administer a program, to consider its relationship to other historical records programs, and to encourage maximum research use of the records holdings.

5. Few historical records programs have developed sound approaches to the problem of preservation of their records. One significant shortcoming in practically all historical records programs in the State is the absence of either plans or facilities for ensuring the preservation of historical records or the information they contain.

The problem is a pervasive one. Most of the records created up to the present time are on paper that with the passage of time will inevitably deteriorate. The disintegrative process is especially rapid for high-acid, wood pulp paper used extensively during the past century. Modern information management technology has not offered a definite solution to the problem. Microfilm, for example, will also deteriorate unless it is produced to exacting archival standards and stored under proper conditions. Magnetic media may lose the capacity to be read and interpreted by machines, and most computer printouts are on thin, high-acid, poor quality paper which breaks down rapidly. In a sense, preservation may be regarded as the most important historical records issue in New York today. The physical deterioration of our records could nullify all efforts at improved management and access.

A series of interrelated problems have prevented a systematic approach to this problem of long-term preservation:

A. Program managers often do not appreciate the seriousness of the problem or do not know how to improve storage facilities and handling procedures to prolong the life of records.

B. Repositories lack financial resources to upgrade storage facilities, or to carry out any significant

restoration work.

C. Few historical records repositories have professional conservators or laboratory facilities for repairing or otherwise treating records, and few, if any, service centers are available in the State for this work.

D. Few repositories have microfilming equipment or facilities for properly storing microfilm.

Unless a more systematic approach is developed to address this problem, much of New York's documentary heritage will inevitably be lost before it can be of any benefit to our citizens.

6. Developments in information technology pose unprecedented opportunities as well as challenges to historical records programs. Dramatic changes in technology used to create, store, and manipulate information have altered the nature of historical records work, and will bring even more significant changes in the future. Advanced micrographics systems, including some linked with computers, present the possibility of miniaturization and rapid retrieval of recorded information. The advent of automated data processing and the proliferation of relatively inexpensive mini- and microcomputers mean that more and more information will be created and maintained in machine-readable form. On the horizon are even more dramatic developments, such as optical disc technology, which has the potential for compacting information on a scale never before thought possible.

These and other advances in information technology hold the potential for preserving historical records and transmitting the information they contain on an unprecedented scale and with unprecedented speed. However, in order to take advantage of technological breakthroughs, the historical records com-

Modern technology presents both great opportunities and complex problems to historical records programs. Computers can assist with description of historical records and with retrieval of this descriptive information. On the other hand, it is difficult to identify and evaluate information of long-range value that is created only in machine-readable form. Preserving this information and making it accessible in the future also present special challenges which have not yet been mastered by the archival profession.

munity needs constantly to monitor developments in information technology, and to develop standards and procedures for ensuring the survival of essential records or the information they contain.

7. Compilation of a statewide listing of historical records is assisting the management of historical records and stimulating wider research in the records; its continuation is crucial to improved access and program development. During the past several years, the New York Historical Resources Center at Cornell University has surveyed, and produced computer-generated guides to, historical records in repositories in over half of the State. This project, which has operated largely on grant funds from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, has been successful in locating and describing many historical records that had been unknown or only partially known to researchers and even to the custodians of the records themselves. The survey project has provided these custodians with a more accurate and complete listing of their holdings than ever existed in the past, and has made it possible for researchers to locate and use this material. The survey is essential for developing documentation strategies, repository cooperation, and a broadened public awareness of the nature and importance of New York's documentary heritage.

However, at the time the present report was prepared, much of the State—the Hudson Valley, Long Island, and New York City—still had not been surveyed, and Cornell University was reluctantly preparing to discontinue the survey. The National Endowment for the Humanities has offered a three-year matching grant to support survey work in New York City, but a bill introduced in the 1983 Legislature, at the request of the State Education Department to provide state funds to match the NEH offer, failed to pass despite endorsement by the State Historical Records Advisory Board, and widespread support from the State's historical records and research community. The future of the survey is, therefore, very much in doubt. The provision of State funds is essential if the survey is to continue and to cover the remainder of the State.

8. Historical records are underutilized to the detriment of society, present and future. Research in practically all scholarly fields would profit from more extensive reliance on historical records. Public adminstrators, as well as managers and policymakers in a broad range of private institutions, would also benefit from analyses based on study of historical records. Even scholars, however, often overlook available archival sources and rely instead on newspapers and published reports to reconstruct and understand the past. Frequently, the available archival materials provide more accurate, extensive, and meaningful information than any other sources. The tendency not to rely more heavily on archival sources springs from a number of interrelated causes:

A. Potential users may not recognize the importance of records as sources of information, may not realize that records contain data helpful to their studies, and may not know of the existence of relevant records.

B. Historical records custodians have not done enough to describe and publicize the existence of the records they hold, to provide finding aids to the records, and to suggest ways in which the records might be utilized.

C. The records are sometimes so poorly arranged, so inadequately described, or so deteriorated, that they are virtually impossible to use.

9. The National Historical Publications and Records Commission's records grant program has strengthened many historical records programs in New York State and its effectiveness has helped to demonstrate the need for a State-based grant-in-aid program. Since its initiation in 1976, the NHPRC's records grants have significantly strengthened historical records programming in New York State. More NHPRC grants have come to New York than to any other state. Because grant funds have been allocated within the State according to careful guidelines and priorities set by the State Historical Records Advisory Board and by the Federal Commission itself, the relatively limited grant monies have had an impact far beyond the limited NHPRC funding. NHPRC grants, for instance, were instrumental in the initiation or significant growth of archival programs in institutions like Agudath Israel, the YIVO

Institute for Jewish Research, the New York Zoological Society and New York Botanical Garden, the United Negro College Fund, and the Salvation Army. The NHPRC's grant for the Local Government Archives Program, administered by the State Historical Records Advisory Board itself, established a dozen model local government archival programs and pointed the way for future development in this area. Most of these archival programs have continued without additional Federal support. NHPRC has been the main source of support for Cornell University's statewide Historical Records Survey, a project with vast benefits for both the archival and research communities. A Commission grant also partially supported the Historical Records Assessment and Reporting Project, resulting in the present report.

In addition to its impact on program development, the NHPRC records projects have revealed many of New York's historical records needs and the importance of developing statewide strategies to address them. The State Advisory Board's experience in coordinating the NHPRC program also has demonstrated the beneficial role of modest external funding, particularly in conjunction with careful planning and increased institutional support and commitment for the future. Because NHPRC records program funding is only $2 million per year for the entire nation, New York badly needs a modest historical records grant-in-aid program of its own. Such a program could complement Federal grants, private funding, and institutional support. A State-funded grant-in-aid program would draw forth additional support from these other sources far beyond the amount of State funding.

Recommendations

Introductory Note. The recommendations in this section are broad and far-ranging in their potential impact on historical records programs throughout the State. The cooperation and active support of the entire historical records community will be required if common problems are to meet with coordinated solutions as suggested below. Moreover, the sustained interest and support of concerned citizens also will be essential as historical records programs embark on this ambitious agenda. The State Historical Records Advisory Board expects to play a major role in promoting implementation of the recommendations, as indicated in Recommendation No. 12, below.

1. Long-term goals and priorities should be established for meeting historical records needs throughout the State. It is essential for the historical records community in New York State to formulate goals and priorities as general guidelines for historical records programming to better meet its responsibilities to the public. The process of formulating and monitoring progress toward the goals should be carried out as follows:

A. A formal list of priority activities and long-term goals should be established as soon as possible, based primarily on the results of this Assessment and Reporting Project.

B. A system should be developed to monitor progress toward defined goals.

C. A biennial report should be prepared for the Governor and shared with the interested public on progress toward defined goals.

D. At five-year intervals, the statement of priorities and goals should be assessed and revised.

E. At ten-year intervals, a full-fledged field assessment should take place.

2. More cooperation and communication must be developed among historical records programs. In the face of limited resources and the massive challenge of preserving New York's past, present, and future documentary heritage, historical records programs must work more closely together, identify their common interests and needs, develop cooperative solutions to problems wherever possible, and strive for a comprehensive documentation strategy for the State. The process of establishing goals and priorities, outlined in Recommendation No. 1, above, should encourage progress in this direction. Two additional steps should be taken:

A. A statewide newsletter should be published to draw together the State's historical records community and provide news on historical records issues and activities.

B. There should be improved communication among associations of archivists, historians, librarians, information specialists, and public officials to ensure full discussion of issues affecting historical records programming throughout the State. This should be achieved through presentations by archivists at meetings of historians and librarians, through joint meetings of their professional associations, and through publication of articles on historical records issues in historical and library newsletters and journals.

3. Organizations and associations concerned with historical records should act in concert to promote historical records programs. Archival or-

ganizations, related organizations in history, library, and information management fields, and associations of local government officials should collaborate to promote historical records program development and support throughout the State. Two related steps would assist with this process:

A. Archival associations should form a joint committee to coordinate advocacy work and to monitor State legislation and funding decisions that could affect archival programs.

B. These associations should join with other library, information, and cultural organizations and with public officials to form a coalition for concerted action on statewide historical records and related issues.

4. Public information and educational programs should be developed by historical records programs throughout the State. These efforts should be aimed at educating and raising the consciousness of the public regarding the value and importance of historical records and of archival work. Specific activities should be as follows:

A. Audiovisual presentations on "Historical Records and Society" should be developed for the general public.

B. Special attention should be given to developing the interest of the news media in historical records and archival programming issues.

C. Publications and workshop presentations for repositories should be developed, based on approaches that have proven successful, on how to interest the public in historical records issues.

D. Whenever possible, educational programs on the administration and social value of historical records should be linked to historic sites, parks, and other facilities that regularly present public programs in history and related cultural fields.

5. More varied and significant use of historical records should be encouraged. Historical records managers should make greater efforts to encourage wider research use of their holdings, especially in areas other than history and genealogy. This should be done through development of imaginative public programs that inform the general public as well as researchers about historical records and the information in them, and that suggest ways that the records could be used for a variety of research. In addition:

A. Materials should be developed on research techniques for archival materials.

B. Historical records programs should establish effective liaison with educational institutions and professional organizations to actively promote the wider use of historical records for research.

C. A special effort should be made to promote wider use of historical records in elementary, junior high, and high schools, particularly in connection with state-mandated curriculum requirements for history and social studies classes.

6. The statewide survey of historical records now in progress must be completed for the rest of the State. Since the citizens of New York, researchers on all subjects, and repositories throughtout the State will benefit from completion of this survey, State funds should be made available to ensure its completion for the remainder of the State. Plans should be developed for building on the initial survey to maintain a statewide data base with information on historical records and their repositories. Planning for the data base should be integrated as closely as possible with other statewide functions and activities carried out by the State Historical Records Advisory

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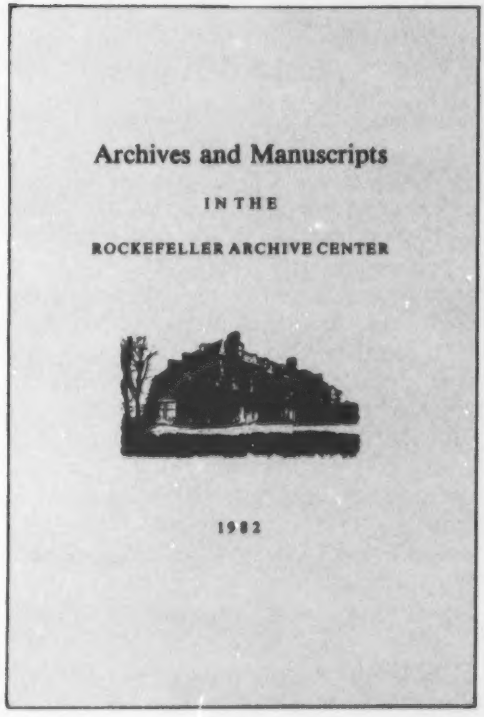
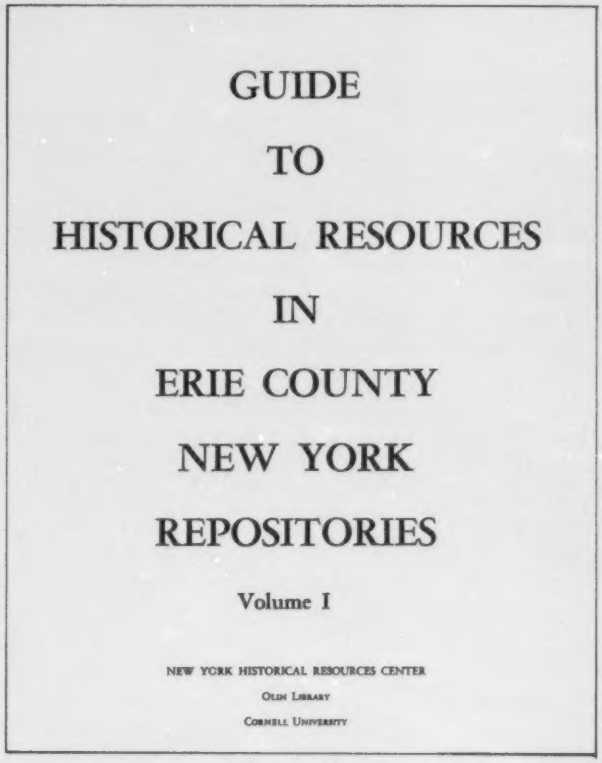
Board and other groups. Planning for the survey should provide for information about repositories as well as their holdings.

A. The survey should be completed under the general coordination of the State Historical Records Advisory Board.

B. The State Historical Records Advisory Board should appoint a group, including representatives of repositories, researchers, and other experts, to advise and assist the survey. The group should: (a) review procedures, work plans, and resource needs for completing the project; (b) work to raise public awareness of the progress and importance of the project; and (c) propose long-range plans for the development of a statewide data base.





A guide to the collections of the Rockefeller Archive Center at Pocantico Hills (left) and another to the holdings of all historical records repositories in Erie County (above). Less than fifteen percent of New York repositories have published a guide. This deficiency reinforces the need for continuation of the statewide Historical Documents Inventory which has already published comprehensive guides to collections in nearly forty upstate counties. The HDI's automated data base also is designed to produce a statewide guide as well as regional and special subject guides. At the time of the Board's report, legislation was pending in New York to provide State funds to match a Federal grant offer of nearly $400,000 for three years of surveying in New York City repositories. The survey has not yet reached the Hudson Valley or Long Island.

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7. A statewide strategy should be initiated to provide professional development opportunities for personnel who have charge of historical records. Historical records program administrators must have the opportunity to learn more about essential elements of managing such programs, and people working directly with the records must be able to learn archival techniques necessary to care for them. To this end, a statewide approach should be developed to significantly broaden the training opportunities that are available to promote professional development. Two considerations should guide development of a comprehensive approach in this area:

A. The statewide approach should consider and, as far as practical, integrate all available training opportunities, including regional and other advisory services (described in Areas B and C of this report), professional publications, training offered by professional organizations, historical associations, and library groups, and formal courses on archival techniques offered by institutions of higher learning. The goal should be to provide a sufficient array of training opportunities to meet professional development needs with a minimum of overlap and competition.

B. Two distinct types of training opportunities should be made available. The first type should cover historical records program management. This should stress program policy and planning, management and evaluation; the development of collection, preservation, reference, and public outreach programs; and the integration of individual program efforts into regional or subject-oriented documentation strategies. The second type of training should deal with historical records program implementation. This should stress the means of carrying out administrative and management policies, the practical techniques of working with records, assisting researchers, and carrying on the other aspects of day-to-day historical records work.

8. A statewide strategy should be developed to deal with historical records preservation. Because of the central importance of preserving the State's documentary heritage, and because of the expense and technical challenges this presents, a statewide strategy should be developed to address preservation problems in the most comprehensive and cost-effective way. This strategy should be integrated, where possible, with preservation program development for libraries. Elements of this strategy should include the following:

A. Adoption of historical records microfilming and other forms of image technology, such as optical discs, on as broad a scale as possible. For the present, microfilming should be regarded as most repositories' highest priority and the preferred approach in carrying out their responsibility to preserve and make available to researchers the information in the records they hold. In implementing this strategy for State and local government records and for historical records in nongovernmental repositories, the following goals should be met: (1) records should be filmed to archival standards as established by the American National Standards Institute and the National Micrographics Association (now called the Association for Information and Image Management); (2) a statewide master listing of all available historical records microfilm should be developed, continuously updated, and made easily available throughout the State.

B. Development of a central microforms repository at the State Archives for all historical records microfilm produced in the State. The Archives should

also provide a copy of all such film for use by researchers in Albany and in an Archives office in New York City. The Archives also should make copies available for interlibrary loan.

C. Publication of manuals and provision of training that stress the adminstrative and managerial aspects of preservation—how to evaluate collections, assess preservation needs, establish priorities, formulate disaster plans, and relate conservation and microfilming program development to overall institutional collection development and management policies.

D. Provision of basic conservation measures for all records in historical records repositories. These measures include cleaning, refoldering, and reboxing where necessary into acid-free containers; storage in environments with temperature and humidity controls; provision of adequate security; and supervision of research use to minimize wear and tear on the records.

E. Application of such intensive conservation measures as deacidification and encapsulation only to those records carefully selected because of their intrinsic value.

F. Development of conservation service centers for ready access to advisory and restoration services.

G. Close monitoring of new information storage technologies to ensure that such developments are integrated into preservation planning and into overall documentation strategies.

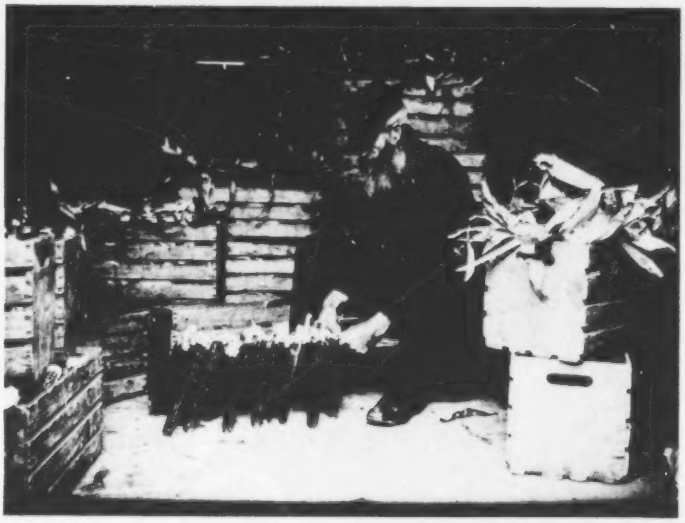
9. The National Historical Publications and Records Commission's records grant program should be continued and expanded. New Yorkers concerned with preservation and use of historical records should work for increased resources for this program. The NHPRC grant program can continue to have a major impact in improving historical records programming in New York through the Commission's newly increased emphasis on State Advisory Board-administered and Board-endorsed projects addressing needs beyond those of individual repositories. NHPRC support can be crucial to the research and pilot projects essential to develop and test improved approaches to historical records work in our State.

10. State grant funds should be allocated to support special historical records projects. A State grant-in-aid program should be initiated to improve historical records work. The program should support basic archival activities such as surveying, accessioning, arranging, describing, preserving, and microfilming historical records. If only very limited NHPRC funds are available, the State program should give priority to regional and cooperative programs, to institutional evaluation and planning, and to research and pilot projects designed to test and develop new approaches to significant problems. To ensure the most effective use of available funds, the following steps should be taken:

A. Within the general priorities listed above, more detailed guidelines should be developed to indicate clearly the types of projects that would be funded in such areas as program planning, evaluation of collections for research, arrangement and description, microfilming, expert consultation, automation, and preservation.

B. Guidelines should be developed to provide that allocation of funds by region should depend in part on the development of regional collecting and documentation plans as recommended in Area C of this report and that grants to individual repositories should depend in part on their participation in such a

Three photographs from the Verne Morton collection of the DeWitt Historical Society of Tompkins County preserved through a project supported by a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. New York presently has no State-funded assistance program for historic records preservation similar to its support programs for the arts. Many of New York's most important historical photographs, for example, await duplication or other treatment necessary to preserve them and make them available for educational programs and for research.



"Braiding seed corn, 1905"

"Working to free a school bus stuck in mud, 1933"

"Bell Telephone office desk, Groton, New York, 1908"

regional system (see Recommendation No. 1 under Area C, above).

C. Grants to individual repositories should be largely on a matching basis to promote greater institutional, local government, and private-sector support.

11. A separate effort should be made to identify and encourage private-sector funding for historical records projects. Historical records programs should take advantage of growing public interest in historical records by making cooperative efforts to reach out to private foundations, corporations, and other private funding sources to persuade them to support historical records projects. Training programs should be developed to show historical records managers how to seek private-sector funding for historical records activities. Informational materials should be developed to educate foundations and the private sector as to the importance of historical records programs to New York's citizens and institutions.

12. The State Historical Records Advisory Board must exercise strong statewide leadership for the improvement of historical records programs in New York State. The Board, operating under its broad mandate of Executive Order No. 38, should provide leadership for the historical records community in addressing the broad agenda laid out in this entire report. The Board should be particularly active in encouraging and monitoring the implementation of Recommendations Nos. 1-11, above, since these are essential to improved historical records programming throughout the State. The Board should build public awareness and support for the archival function in society, coordinate development of statewide goals and priorities for historical records programs, encourage the development of coordinated

documentation strategies and regional technical advisory services, and serve as a clearinghouse for information on historical records programs. The State Archives should serve as the Board's secretariat in carrying out programs to implement the recommendations in this report. The State Education Department and the Division of the Budget should provide adequate funding for the Archives to carry out these activities.

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EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED IN THIS REPORT

Some of the terms used frequently in this report that may not be familiar to all readers are explained below. Some of the explanations given here are based on the definitions given in "A Basic Glossary For Archivists, Manuscripts Curators, and Records Managers," edited by William L. Rofes, in the *American Archivist,* 37 (July 1974).

1. **Access.** The availability of, or permission to do research in, historical records.
2. **Accession.** The act or procedures involved in the transfer of legal title and physical custody of records to a historical records program.
3. **Archives.** This term may be used in any of three ways in this report: (a) the historical records of an organization or institution; also referred to as archival materials or archival holdings; (b) the agency responsible for selecting, preserving, managing, and making available archival records, also referred to as an archival agency; (c) the historical records repository where such materials are located.
4. **Historical records.** Records that contain significant information about the past and are therefore worthy of long-term preservation and systematic management for historical and other research. In this report, the term is used broadly to include archives as well as historical records created by individuals and groups. Historical records may

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include diaries, journals, ledgers, minutes, reports, photographs, maps, drawings, blueprints, agreements, memoranda, deeds, case files, and other material. They may take any of several physical forms—parchment, paper, microfilm, cassette tape, film, videotape, and, with the advent of the latest information-processing technology, computer tapes, discs, and other "machine-readable" formats. Also referred to as historically valuable records and historical documents.

5. **Historical records program.** Any deliberate, organized effort to care for historical records. Historical records programs usually include the following core functions: appraisal, disposition, accessioning, preservation, arrangement, description, reference services, and exhibitions and other public programs.
6. **Historical records repository.** Any building or facility used to store historical records.
7. **Preservation.** Measures taken to promote the protection, conservation, repair, restoration, or protective reproduction of historical records.
8. **Public programs.** Exhibits, lectures, tours, educational document packets, special publications, and other public presentations.
9. **Record.** Any type of recorded information, regardless of its physical form or characteristics.
10. **Reference service.** The process of making historical records available for use or of providing information about them.
11. **Records management.** Administrative procedures for oversight of the creation, use, maintenance, and disposition of records. The term is used broadly in this report to include: overseeing the creation and use of forms, correspondence, and other records; setting up filing and indexing systems and other means of ensuring easy, rapid access to the information in records; adopting and using modern technology in information creation, storage, and manipulation, particularly microfilm and automated data processing systems; microfilming of selected paper records for security, ease of access, disposition of the bulk paper records after microfilming, and long-term preservation of important information; and systematically disposing of records.
12. **Series.** File units or documents arranged in accordance with a filing system or maintained as a unit because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, have a particular form, or because of some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, or use. Also referred to as "records series."

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Pages 68 and 69: DeWitt Historical Society of Tompkins County

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